

# Impressions

## Supplementary Reader for Class XII (Core English)

### Editors

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राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्  
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## FOREWORD

The *National Curriculum Framework for School Education-2000* (NCFSE-2000) highlights language teaching as an important instrument for developing among the learners desired attitudes and socially accepted values along with the inculcation of core life-skills. Language teaching at the higher secondary stage aims at revitalising education by giving it a new direction, by making it socially and individually relevant and by relating it to national aspirations and learners' emotional, social and cognitive development. Language learning seeks to encourage in the learners independent thinking, free and effective expression of ideas and opinions both in speech and writing.

*Impressions* is a supplementary reader in English for Class XII (Core Course). This book is designed to promote in the learners' a love for reading by exposing them to a variety of materials which hold a mirror to different facets of life. Importance is given to generation of ideas, to make the learners more creative and eventually inspire them to think. The different styles and genres of English prose will not only give the requisite worldly wisdom but also elevate the thoughts of the students.

I am grateful to all the participants of the Review Workshop who helped in the development and finalisation of the manuscript of this book. The NCERT sincerely hopes that this book will meet the learning needs of the students of Class XII. The comments and suggestions of teachers and students on any aspect of this book are welcome. This would enable us to improve the next edition.

J.S. RAJPUT

*Director*

January 2003  
New Delhi

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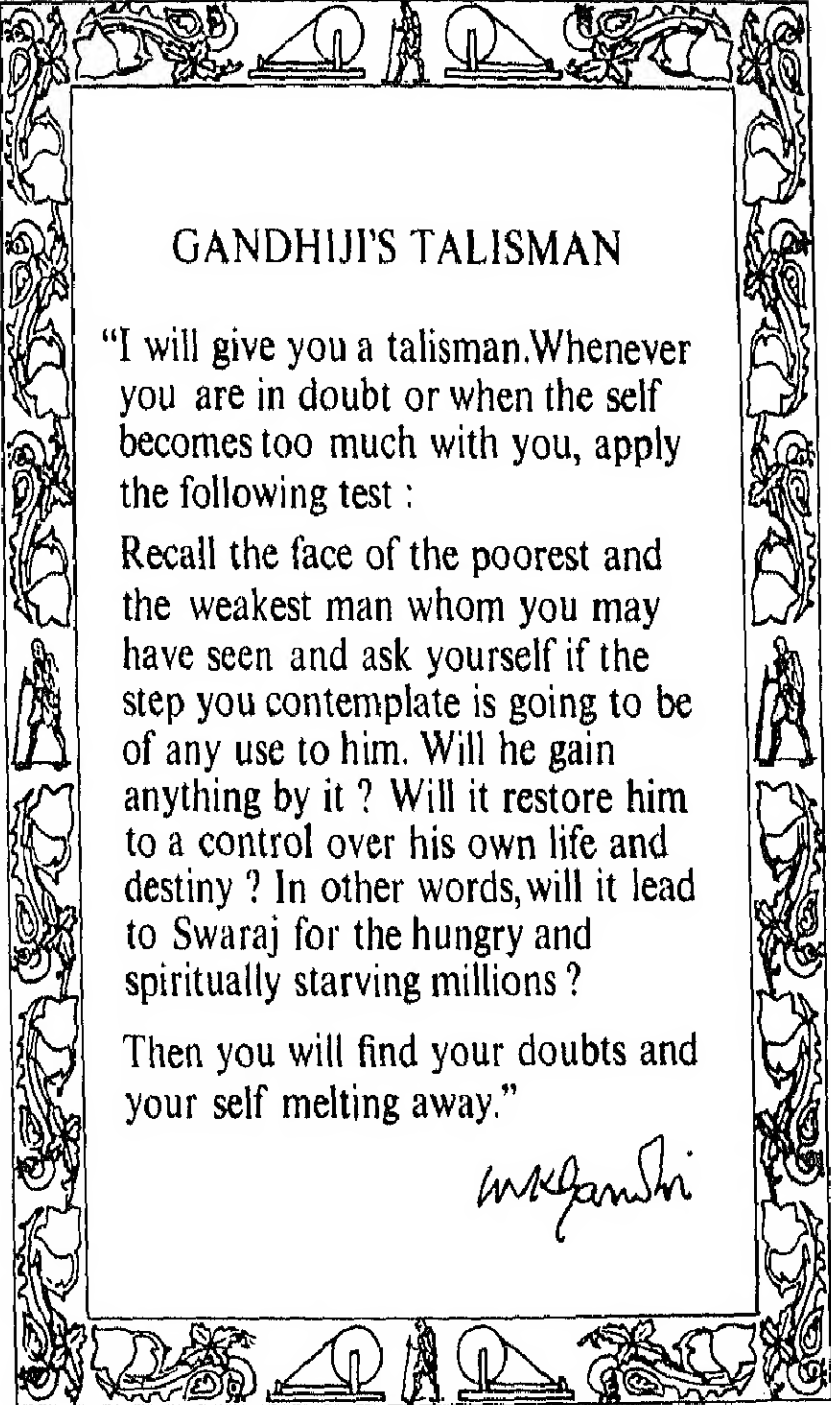
## A NOTE TO THE TEACHER

*Impressions* is a supplementary reader in English (Core Course) for Class XII. This book is meant to supplement the textbook *English With A Purpose*. The main objective of this book is to make extensive reading an enjoyable experience. It will also generate among the learners new ideas, make them more creative and ultimately inspire them to think.

An attempt has been made to attain these objectives by introducing varied situations and events through different styles and genres of English prose. There are ten pieces in this book (stories, speeches, an extract from an autobiography, a letter, an article and a play), whose thematic range varies from the joys and sorrows of day-to-day life to the deep social, emotional and psychological conflicts of individuals. These will help the learners appreciate critically the vast panorama of life and the interactions of human beings therein.

After each lesson, the meanings of words crucial for the understanding of the piece are provided. The comprehension exercises are both local and global in nature. The purpose of these exercises is to arouse the learners' curiosity and to direct their attention to points of significance. The questions under 'Appreciation' will help the learners to think and critically appreciate varied situations and also the behaviour of characters in these given situations and thus to form opinions as objective observers. The topics meant for 'Discussion' will help the learners become aware of the world around them and express themselves effectively orally and in writing. The learners will get an opportunity to discover the unknown vistas of knowledge and thus it will impart a sense of fulfilment. A few books and stories are listed at the end of each chapter for extensive reading.

The purpose of the book will be served if these pieces make the students sensitive, good human beings and effective communicators.



## GANDHIJ'S TALISMAN

"I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test :

Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it ? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny ? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions ?

Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away."

*M.K. Gandhi*

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# CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

## Part IV A

### Fundamental Duties of Citizens

#### ARTICLE 51A

Fundamental Duties - It shall be the duty of every citizen of India —

- (a) to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem;
- (b) to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom;
- (c) to uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India;
- (d) to defend the country and render national service when called upon to do so;
- (e) To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;
- (f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;
- (g) to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, wild life and to have compassion for living creatures;
- (h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;
- (i) to safeguard public property and to abjure violence;
- (j) to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement.



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*Our past and heredit;  
lay the foundation of  
our future*

# The Face on the Wall

*E.V. Lucas (1868-1938) was a renowned essayist and short story writer. His style is simple yet captivating. In the present story he deals with the theme of the supernatural. There is an element of surprise in the story which makes the narrative fascinating.*

I STILL tingle with mortification over an experience at Dabney's last evening, the only satisfaction being that others tingle with me. We were talking of the supernatural — that unprofitable but endlessly alluring theme — and most of us had cited an instance, without, however, producing much effect. Among the strangers to me was a little man with an anxious white face, whom Rudson-Wayte had brought, and he watched each speaker with the closest attention, but said nothing. Then Dabney, wishing to include him in the talk, turned to him and asked if he had no experience to relate, no story that contained an inexplicable element.

He thought a moment. "Well," he said, "not a story in the ordinary sense of the word: nothing, that is, from hearsay, like most of your examples. Truth, I always hold, is not only vastly stranger than fiction, but also vastly more interesting. I could tell you an occurrence which happened to me

personally and which oddly enough completed itself only this afternoon."

We begged him to begin.

"A year or two ago," he said, "I was in rooms in Great Ormond Street — an old house on the Holborn side. The bedroom walls had been distempered by a previous tenant, but the place was damp and great patches of discolouration, had broken out. One of these — as indeed often happens — was exactly like a human face; but more faithfully and startlingly than is customary? Lying in bed in the morning putting off getting up, I used to watch it and watch it, and gradually I came to think of it as real — as my fellow lodger, in fact. The odd thing was that while the patches on the walls grew larger and changed their contours, this never did. It remained identically the same.

"While there, I had a very bad attack of influenza, with complications, and all day long I had nothing to do but read or meditate, and it was then that this face began to get a



firmer hold of me. It grew more and more real and remarkable. I may say that it dominated my thoughts day and night. There was a curious turn to the nose, and the slant of the forehead was unique. It was, in fact, full of individuality: the face of a man apart, a man in a thousand.

"Well, I got better, but the face still controlled me. I found myself searching the streets for one like it. Somewhere, I was convinced, the real man must exist, and him I must meet. Why, I had no notion; I only knew that he and I were in some way linked by fate. I frequented places where men congregate in large numbers — political meetings, football matches, the railway stations when the suburban trains pour forth their legions on the City in the morning and receive them again in the evening. But all in vain. I had never before realised as I then did how many different faces of man there are and how few. For all differ, and yet, classed, they belong to only as many groups as you count on your hands.

"The search became a mania with me. I neglected everything else. I stood at busy corners watching the crowd until people thought me crazy, and the police began to know me and be suspicious. Women I never glanced at; men, men, and men, all the time."

He passed his hand wearily over his brow. "And then," he continued, "at last I saw him. He was in a taxi driving east along Piccadilly. I turned and ran beside it for a little way and then saw an empty one coming. 'Follow that taxi,' I gasped, and leaped in. The driver managed to keep it in sight and it took us to Charing Cross. I rushed on to the platform and found my man with two ladies and a little girl. They were going to France by the 2.20. I hung about to try and get a word with him, but in vain. Other friends had joined the party, and they moved to the train in a solid body.

"I hastily purchased a ticket to Folkestone, hoping that I should catch him on the boat before it sailed; but at Folkestone he got on board before me with his friends, and they disappeared into a large private saloon, several cabins thrown into one. Evidently he was a man of wealth.

"Again I was foiled; but I determined to cross too, feeling certain that when the voyage had begun he would leave the ladies and come out for a stroll on the deck. I had only just

enough fare to Boulogne, but nothing could shake me now. I took up my position opposite the saloon door and waited. After half an hour the door opened and he came out, but with the little girl. My heart beat so that it seemed to shake the boat more than the propeller. There was no mistaking the face — every line was the same. He glanced at me and moved towards the companion-way for the upper deck. It was now or never, I felt.

"Excuse me," I stammered, "but do you mind giving me your card? I have a very important reason for wishing to communicate with you."

"He seemed to be astonished, as indeed well he might; but he complied. With extreme deliberation he took out his case and handed me his card and hurried on with the little girl. It was clear that he thought me a lunatic and considered it wiser to humour me than not.

"Clutching the card I hurried to a deserted corner of the ship and read it. My eyes dimmed; my head swam; for on it were the words: Mr Ormond Wall with an address at Pittsburg, U.S.A. I remember no more until I found myself at Boulogne. There I lay in a broken condition for some weeks, and only a month ago did I return."

He was silent.

We looked at him and at one another and waited. All the other talk of the evening was nothing compared with the story of the little pale man.

"I went back," he resumed after a moment or so, "to Great Ormond Street and set to work to discover all I could about this American in whose life I had so mysteriously intervened. I wrote to Pittsburg; I wrote to American editors; I cultivated the society of Americans in London; but all that I could find out was that he was a millionaire with English parents who had resided in London. But where? To that question I received no answer.

"And so the time went on until yesterday morning. I had gone to bed more than usually tired and slept till late. When I woke the sun was streaming into the room. As I always do, I looked at once at the wall on which the face is to be seen. I rubbed my eyes and sprang up in alarm. It was only faintly visible. Last night it had been as clear as ever — almost I could hear it speak. And now it was but a ghost of itself.

"I got up dazed and dejected and went out. The early editions of the newspapers were already out, and on the contents bill I saw 'American millionaire's Motor Accident'. You must all of you have seen it. I bought it and read at once what I knew I should read. Mr Ormond Wall, the Pittsburg millionaire, and party, motoring from Spezzla to Pisa, had come into collision with a wagon and were overturned; Mr Wall's condition was critical.

"I went back to my room still dazed, and sat on the bed looking with unseeing eyes at the face on the wall. And even as I looked, suddenly it completely disappeared.

"Later I found that Mr Wall had succumbed to his injuries at what I take to be that very moment."

Again he was silent.

"Most remarkable," we said; "most extraordinary," and so forth, and we meant it too.

"Yes," said the stranger. "There are three extraordinary, three most remarkable things about my story. One is that it should be possible for the discolouration in a lodging-house in London not only to form the features of a gentleman in America, but to have this intimate association with his existence. It will take Science some time to explain that. Another is that that gentleman's name should bear any relation to the spot on which his features were being so curiously reproduced by some mysterious agency. Is it not so?"

We agreed with him, and our original discussion on supernatural manifestations set in again with increased excitement, during which the narrator of the amazing experience rose and said good-night. Just as he was at the door, one of the company — I rejoice to think it was Spanton — recalled us to the cause of our excited debate by asking him, before he left, what he considered the third extraordinary thing in connection with his deeply interesting story. "You said three things, you know," Spanton reminded him.

"Oh, the third thing," he said, as he opened the door, "I was forgetting that. The third extraordinary thing about the story is that I made it up about half an hour ago; Good-night, again."

After coming to our senses we looked round for Rudson-Wayte, who had brought this snake to bite our bosoms, but he too had disappeared.

### Glossary

- mortification** : embarrassment, humiliation  
**inexplicable** : that cannot be explained  
**contours** : outlines  
**legions** : large numbers  
**foiled** : frustrated in an attempt  
**deliberation** : careful consideration

### Comprehension

1. What were the narrator and his friends discussing at Dabney's?
2. What kind of an experience did the 'little man with an anxious white face' offer to narrate?
3. What had the narrator seen on the wall of his room? And what was so peculiar about it?
4. What dominated the thoughts of the narrator when he had an attack of influenza?
5. How did the search for the face become an obsession with the narrator?
6. Did the narrator find the man he was looking for? Describe their encounter.
7. What did the narrator discover when he looked at the man's visiting card?
8. The patch on the wall became dull and then it suddenly disappeared. What did it signify?
9. Out of the three remarkable things, the narrator mentioned two. What were these?
10. What was the third remarkable thing? What effect did it have on the people present?

### Appreciation

1. The supernatural is 'an unprofitable but endlessly alluring theme'. Elucidate.
2. 'Truth is not only vastly stranger than fiction but also more interesting.' Justify.
3. There is a patch on the wall and the name of the wealthy man is also Ormond Wall. Do you think the narrator of the story has done it intentionally? Comment.



**For Discussion**

The supernatural is an irrefutable aspect of our existence.

**Suggested Reading**

*Markheim* by R.L. Stevenson

*Canterville Ghost* by Oscar Wilde

*The Hunger for Stones* by Rabindranath Tagore

(A translation of *Kshudhita Pâshân*)



# 2

## Gandhiji as a Schoolmaster



*Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) was popularly known as Bapu (the Father). In the present piece, taken from his autobiography, The Story of My Experiments with Truth, he narrates his experiences in South Africa where he spent part of his early life participating in various movements of the people. He writes about the school he helped to establish and where he subsequently taught, not so much as a professional school teacher but as part of a larger movement where young minds could be properly trained in manners and morals. Gandhiji writes frankly with many personal touches and in a simple, direct style.*

As the Farm grew, it was found necessary to make some provision for the education of its boys and girls. There were, among these, Hindu, Musalman, Parsi and Christian boys and some Hindu girls. It was not possible, and I did not think it necessary to engage special teachers for them. It was not possible, for qualified Indian teachers were scarce, and even when available, none would be ready to go to a place 21 miles

distant from Johannesburg on a small salary. Also we were certainly not over-flowing with money. And I did not think it necessary to import teachers from outside the Farm. I did not believe in the existing system of education, and I had a mind to find out by experience and experiment the true system. Only this much I knew — that, under ideal conditions, true education could be imparted only by the parents, and that then there should be the minimum of outside help, that Tolstoy Farm was a family, in which I occupied the place of the father, and that I should so far as possible shoulder the responsibility for the training of the young.

The conception no doubt was not without its flaws. All the young people had not been with me since their childhood, they had been brought up on different conditions and environments, and they did not belong to the same religion. How could I do full justice to the young people, thus circumstanced, even if I assumed the place of paterfamilias?

But I had always given the first place to the culture of the heart or the building of character, and as I felt confident the moral training could be given to all alike, no matter how different their ages and their upbringing, I decided to live amongst them all the twenty-four hours of the day as their father. I regarded character building as the proper foundation for their education and, if the foundation was firmly laid, I was sure that the children could learn all the other things themselves or with the assistance of friends.

But as I fully appreciated the necessity of a literary training in addition, I started some classes with the help of Mr. Kallenbach and Sjt. Pragji Desai. Nor did I underrate the building up of the body. This they got in the course of their daily routine. For there were no servants on the Farm, and all the work, from cooking down to scavenging, was done by the inmates. There were many fruit trees to be looked after, and enough gardening to be done as well. Mr. Kallenbach was fond of gardening and had gained some experience of this work in one of the Governmental model gardens. It was obligatory on all, young and old, who were not engaged in the kitchen, to give some time to gardening. The children had the lion's share of this work, which included digging pits, felling timber and lifting loads. This gave them ample exercise. They took delight

in the work, and so they did not generally need any other exercise or games. Of course some of them, and sometimes all of them, malingered and shirked. Sometimes I connived at their pranks, but often I was strict with them. I dare say they did not like the strictness, but I do not recollect their having resisted it. Whenever I was strict, I would, by argument, convince them that it was not right to play with one's work. The conviction would, however, be short-lived, the next moment they would again leave their work and go to play. All the same we got along, and at any rate they built up fine physiques. There was scarcely any illness on the Farm, though it must be said that good air and water and regular hours of food were not a little responsible for this.

A word about vocational training. It was my intention to teach every one of the youngsters some useful manual vocation. For this purpose Mr. Kallenbach went to a Trappist monastery and returned having learnt shoe-making, I learnt it from him and taught the art to such as were ready to take it up. Mr. Kallenbach had some experience of carpentry, and there was another inmate who knew it; so we had a small class in carpentry. Cooking almost all the youngsters knew.

All this was new to them. They had never even dreamt that they would have to learn these things some day. For generally the only training that Indian children received in South Africa was in the three R's.

On Tolstoy Farm we made it a rule that the youngsters should not be asked to do what the teachers did not do and therefore, when they were asked to do any work, there was always a teacher co-operating and actually working with them. Hence, whatever the youngsters learnt, they learnt cheerfully.

Literary training, however, was a more difficult matter. I had neither the resources nor the literary equipment necessary; and I had not the time I would have wished to devote to the subject. The physical work that I was doing used to leave me thoroughly exhausted at the end of the day, and I used to have the classes just when I was most in need of some rest. Instead, therefore, of my being fresh for the class, I could with the greatest difficulty keep myself awake. The mornings had to be devoted to work on the farm and domestic duties, so the school hours had to be kept after the midday meal. There was no other time suitable for the school.

We gave three periods at the most to literary training. Hindi, Tamil, Gujarati and Urdu were all taught, and tuition was given through the vernaculars of the boys. English was taught as well. It was also necessary to acquaint the Gujarati Hindu children with a little Sanskrit, and to teach all the children elementary history, geography and arithmetic.

I had undertaken to teach Tamil and Urdu. The little Tamil I knew was acquired during the voyage and in jail. I had not got beyond People's excellent Tamil handbook. My knowledge of the Urdu script was all that I had acquired on a single voyage, and my knowledge of the language was confined to the familiar Persian and Arabic words that I had learnt from contact with Musalman friends. Of Sanskrit I knew no more than I had learnt at the high school, even my Gujarati was no better than that which one acquires at the school.

Such was the capital with which I had to carry on. In poverty of literary equipment my colleagues went one better than I. But my love for the languages of my country, my confidence in my capacity as a teacher, as also the ignorance of my pupils, and more than that, their generosity, stood me in good stead.

The Tamil boys were all born in South Africa, and therefore knew very little Tamil, and did not know the script at all. So I had to teach them the script and the rudiments of grammar. That was easy enough. My pupils knew that they could any day beat me in Tamil conversation, and when Tamilians, not knowing English, came to see me, they became my interpreters. I got along merrily, because I never attempted to disguise my ignorance from my pupils. In all respects I showed myself to them exactly as I really was. Therefore in spite of my colossal ignorance of the language I never lost their love and respect. It was comparatively easier to teach the Musalman boys Urdu. They knew the script. I had simply to stimulate in them an interest in reading and to improve their handwriting.

These youngsters were for the most part unlettered and unschooled. But I found in the course of my work that I had very little to teach them, beyond weaning them from their laziness, and supervising their studies. As I was content with this, I could pull on with boys of different ages and learning different subjects in one and the same class room.

Of textbooks, about which we hear so much, I never felt the want. I do not even remember having made much use of the books that were available. I did not find it at all necessary to load the boys with quantities of books. I have always felt the true text-book for the pupil is his teacher. I remember very little that my teachers taught me from books, but I have even now a clear recollection of the things they taught me independently of books.

Children take in much more and with less labour through their ears than through their eyes. I do not remember having read any book from cover to cover with my boys. But I gave them, in my own language, all that I had digested from my reading of various books, and I dare say they are still carrying a recollection of it in their minds. It was laborious for them to remember what they learnt from books, but what I imparted to them by word of mouth, they could repeat with the greatest ease. Reading was a task for them, but listening to me was a pleasure, when I did not bore them by failure to make my subject interesting. And from the questions that my talks prompted them to put, I had a measure of their power of understanding.

The spiritual training of the boys was a much more difficult matter than their physical and mental training. I relied little on religious books for the training of the spirit. Of course I believed that every student should be acquainted with the elements of his own religion and have a general knowledge of his own scriptures, and therefore I provided for such knowledge as best as I could. But that, to my mind, was part of the intellectual training. Long before I undertook the education of the youngsters of the Tolstoy Farm I had realised that the training of the spirit was a thing by itself. To develop the spirit is to build character and to enable one to work towards a knowledge of God and self-realisation. And I held that this was an essential part of the training of the young, and that all training without culture of the spirit was of no use, and might be even harmful.

I am familiar with the superstition that 'self-realisation is possible only in the fourth stage of life, i.e. sannyasa (renunciation). But it is a matter of common knowledge that those who defer preparation for this invaluable experience until the last stage of life attain not self-realisation but old

age amounting to a second and pitiable childhood, living as a burden on this earth. I have a full recollection that I held these views even whilst I was teaching i.e., in 1911-12, though I might not then have expressed them in identical language.

How then was this spiritual training to be given? I made the children memorise and recite hymns, and read to them from books on moral training. But that was far from satisfying me. As I came into closer contact with them I saw that it was not through books that one could impart training of the spirit. Just as physical training was to be imparted through physical exercise, and intellectual through intellectual exercise, even so the training of the spirit was possible only through the exercise of the spirit. And the exercise of the spirit entirely depended on the life and character of the teacher. The teacher had always to be mindful of his *P's and Q's* whether he was in the midst of his boys or not.

It is possible for a teacher situated miles away to affect the spirit of the pupils by his way of living. It would be idle for me, if I were a liar, to teach boys to tell the truth. A cowardly teacher would never succeed in making his boys valiant, and a stranger to self-restraint could never teach his pupils the value of self-restraint. I saw, therefore, that I must be an eternal object-lesson to the boys and girls living with me. They thus became my teachers, and I learnt I must be good and live straight, if only for their sakes. I may say that the increasing discipline and restraint I imposed on myself at Tolstoy Farm was mostly due to those wards of mine.

One of them was wild, unruly, given to lying, and quarrelsome. On one occasion he broke out most violently. I was exasperated. I never punished my boys, but this time I was very angry. I tried to reason with him. But he was adamant and even tried to overreach me. At last I picked up a ruler lying at hand and delivered a blow on his arm. I trembled as I struck him. I dare say he noticed it. This was an entirely novel experience for them all. The boy cried out and begged to be forgiven. He cried not because the beating was painful to him; he could, if he had been so minded, have paid me back in the same coin, being a stoutly built youth of seventeen; but he realised my pain in being driven to this violent recourse. Never again after this incident did he disobey me. But I still

repent that violence. I am afraid I exhibited before him that day not the spirit, but the brute, in me.

I have always been opposed to corporal punishment. I remember only one occasion on which I physically punished one of my sons. I have therefore never until this day been able to decide whether I was right or wrong in using the ruler. Probably it was improper, for it was prompted by anger and a desire to punish. Had it been an expression only of my distress, I should have considered it justified. But the motive in this case was mixed.

This incident set me thinking and taught me a better method of correcting students. I do not know whether that method would have availed on the occasion in question. The youngster soon forgot the incident, and I do not think he ever showed great improvement. But the incident made me understand better the duty of a teacher towards his pupils.

Cases of misconduct on the part of the boys often occurred after this, but I never resorted to corporal punishment. Thus in my endeavour to impart spiritual training to the boys and girls under me, I came to understand better and better the power of the spirit.

**M.K. GANDHI**

### Glossary

<b>Farm</b>	: Tolstoy Farm, a communal farm established in 1910 by Gandhiji near Johannesburg (South Africa)
<b>paterfamilias</b>	: father or head of a family
<b>malingering</b>	: to feign illness in order to avoid duty, to shirk
<b>Trappist monastery</b>	: Trappists are members of a religious body belonging to the Roman Catholic Church, a branch of the Cistercian order. They are known for their austere life. A monastery is the place of residence of a group of people, specially monks, who have retired from the world under religious vows.



<b>the 3 R's</b>	: reading, (w)riting and (a)rithmetic
<b>scriptures</b>	: sacred or religious writings or books
<b>mindful of P's and Q's</b>	: be careful not to do or say the wrong thing

### Comprehension

1. Why couldn't Gandhiji engage teachers for his school?
2. What was Gandhiji's role as a patriarch at the Tolstoy Farm? And what were his fears?
3. What did Gandhiji think is the foundation of education?
4. How did Gandhiji manage to look after the physical training of the inmates of the Farm?
5. How was 'vocational training' looked after?
6. Why did Gandhiji consider 'literary training' a more difficult matter?
7. What was Gandhiji's idea about the 'true text-book'?
8. What was Gandhiji's view about the spiritual training of the boys?
9. How did the students become teachers of Gandhiji?

### Appreciation

1. What are the different types of training discussed by Gandhiji? How are they related to one another?
2. How did Gandhiji's love for the languages help him in teaching at the Farm?
3. Discuss the role of the teacher as pointed out by Gandhiji. Do you consider Gandhiji an ideal teacher?
4. Write a paragraph on the proper training of the young.

### For discussion

Education is incomplete without vocational training.

### Suggested Reading

*Gandhiji the Teacher* by Rajkumari Amrit Kaur

*India's Contribution to World Unity* by Arnold Toynbee

*Abraham Lincoln (a play)* by John Drinkwater

# 3



## The Old Demon

Pearl S. Buck (1892–1973), a well known novelist, was born of American missionary parents. Her first playmates were Chinese children, and she could speak their language before she mastered her own. *My Several Worlds* is her famous autobiography and her novel *The Good Earth* won the 1932 Pulitzer Prize. She was the first American woman novelist to receive the Nobel Prize in 1938. She became known for her books which deal sympathetically with life in China. The present story highlights the sacrifice of an old woman for humanity.

OLD MRS. WANG knew of course that there was a war. Everybody had known for a long time that there was war going on and that Japanese were killing Chinese. But still it was not real and no more than hearsay since none of the Wangs had been killed. The Village of Three Mile Wangs on the flat banks of the Yellow River, which was old Mrs. Wang's clan village, had never even seen a Japanese. This was how they came to be talking about Japanese at all.

It was evening and early summer, and after her supper Mrs. Wang had climbed the dike steps, as she did every day, to see how high the river had risen. She was much more afraid of the river than of the Japanese. She knew what the

river would do. And one by one the villagers had followed her up the dike, and now they stood staring down at the malicious yellow water, curling along like a lot of snakes, and boiling at the high dike banks. "I never saw it as high as this so early," Mrs. Wang said. She sat down on a bamboo stool that her grandson, Little Pig, had brought for her, and spat into the water.

"It's worse than the Japanese, this old devil of a river," Little Pig said recklessly.

"Fool!" Mrs. Wang said quickly. "The river god will hear you. Talk about something else."

So they had gone on talking about the Japanese.... How, for instance, asked Wang, the baker, who was old Mrs. Wang's nephew twice removed, would they know the Japanese when they saw them?

Mrs. Wang at this point said positively, "You'll know them. I once saw a foreigner. He was taller than the eaves of my house and he had mud-coloured hair and eyes the colour of a fish's eyes. Anyone who does not look like us — that is a Japanese."

Everybody listened to her since she was the oldest woman in the village and whatever she said settled something.

Then Little Pig spoke up in his disconcerting way. "You can't see them, Grandmother. They hide up in the sky in airplanes."

Mrs. Wang did not answer immediately. Once she would have said positively, "I shall not believe in an airplane until I see it." But so many things had been true which she had not believed — the Empress, for instance, whom she had not believed dead, was dead. The Republic, again, she had not believed in because she did not know what it was. She still did not know, but they had said for a long time there had been one. So now she merely stared quietly about the dike where they all sat around her. It was very pleasant and cool, and she felt nothing mattered if the river did not rise to flood.

"I don't believe in the Japanese," she said flatly. They laughed at her a little, but no one spoke. Someone lit her pipe—it was Little Pig's wife, who was her favourite, and she smoked it.

"Sing, Little Pig!" someone called.

So Little Pig began to sing an old song in a high, quavering voice, and old Mrs. Wang listened and forgot the Japanese. The evening was beautiful, the sky so clear and still that the willows overhanging the dike were reflected even in the muddy water. Everything was at peace. The thirty-odd houses which made up the village straggled along beneath them. Nothing could break this peace. After all, the Japanese were only human beings.

"I doubt those airplanes," she said mildly to Little Pig when he stopped singing.

But without answering her, he went on to another song. Year in and year out she had spent the summer evenings like this on the dike. The first time she was seventeen and a bride, and her husband had shouted to her to come out of the house and up the dike, and she had come, blushing and twisting her hands together, hid among the women. All the same, the villagers had liked her. "A pretty girl", they had said to her husband. "Feet a trifle big," he had answered deprecatingly. But she could see he was pleased, and so gradually her shyness went away.

He, poor man, had been drowned in a flood when he was still young. And it had taken her years to get him prayed out of Buddhist purgatory. Finally she had grown tired of it, what with the child and the land all on her back, and so when the priest said coaxingly, "Another ten pieces of silver and he'll be out entirely," she asked, "What's he got in there yet?"

"Only his right hand," the priest said, encouraging her.

Well, then, her patience broke. Ten dollars! It would feed them for the winter. Besides, she had had to hire labour for her share of repairing the dike, too, so there would be no more floods.

"If it's only one hand, he can pull himself out," she said firmly.

She often wondered if he had, poor silly fellow. As like as not, she had often thought gloomily in the night, he was still lying there, waiting for her to do something about it. That was the sort of man he was. Well, some day, perhaps, when Little Pig's wife had had the first baby safely and she had a little extra, she might go back to finish him out of purgatory. There was no real hurry, though....

"Grandmother, you must go in", Little Pig's wife's soft voice said. "There is a mist rising from the river now that the sun is gone."

"Yes, I suppose I must," old Mrs. Wang agreed. She gazed at the river a moment. That river — it was full of good and evil together. It would water the fields when it was curbed and checked, but then if an inch were allowed it, it crashed through like a roaring dragon. That was how her husband had been swept away — careless, he was, about his bit of the dike. He was always going to mend it, always going to pile more earth on top of it, and then in a night the river rose and broke through. He had run out of the house, and she had climbed on the roof with the child and had saved herself and it while he was drowned. Well, they had pushed the river back again behind its dikes, and it had stayed there this time. Every day she herself walked up and down the length of the dike for which the village was responsible and examined it. The men laughed and said, "If anything is wrong with the dikes, Granny will tell us."

It had never occurred to any of them to move the village away from the river. The Wangs had lived there for generations, and some had always escaped the floods and had fought the river more fiercely than ever afterward.

Little Pig suddenly stopped singing.

"The moon is coming up!" he cried. "That's not good. Airplanes come out on moonlit nights."

"Where do you learn all this about airplanes?" old Mrs. Wang exclaimed. "It is tiresome to me," she added, so severely that no one spoke. In this silence, leaning upon the arm of Little Pig's wife, she descended slowly the earthen steps which led down into the village, using her long pipe in the other hand as a walking stick. Behind her the villagers came down, one by one, to bed. No one moved before she did, but none stayed long after her.

And in her own bed at last, behind the blue cotton mosquito curtains which Little Pig's wife fastened securely, she fell peacefully asleep. She had lain awake a little while thinking about the Japanese and wondering why they wanted to fight. Only very coarse persons wanted wars. In her mind she saw large coarse persons. If they came one must wheedle them,

she thought, invite them to drink tea, and explain to them, reasonably — only why should they come to a peaceful farming village...?

So she was not in the least prepared for Little Pig's wife screaming at her that the Japanese had come. She sat up in bed muttering, "The teabowls — the tea — "

"Grandmother, there's no time!" Little Pig's wife screamed. "They're here — they're here!"

"Where?" old Mrs. Wang cried, now awake.

"In the sky!" Little Pig's wife wailed.

They had all run out at that, into the clear early dawn, and gazed up. There, like wild geese flying in autumn, were great birdlike shapes.

"But what are they?" old Mrs. Wang cried.

And then, like a silver egg dropping, something drifted straight down and fell at the far end of the village in a field. A fountain of earth flew up, and they all ran to see it. There was a hole thirty feet across, as big as a pond. They were so astonished they could not speak, and then, before anyone could say anything, another and another egg began to fall and everybody was running, running...

Everybody, that is, but Mrs. Wang. When Little Pig's wife seized her hand to drag her along, old Mrs. Wang pulled away and sat down against the bank of the dike.

"I can't run," she remarked. "I haven't run in seventy years, since before my feet were bound. You go on. Where's Little Pig?" She looked around. Little Pig was already gone. "Like his grandfather," she remarked, "always the first to run."

But Little Pig's wife would not leave her, not, that is, until old Mrs. Wang reminded her that it was her duty.

"If Little Pig is dead," she said, "then it is necessary that his son be born alive." And when the girl still hesitated, she struck at her gently with her pipe. "Go on — go on," she exclaimed.

So unwillingly, because now they could scarcely hear each other speak for the roar of the dipping planes, Little Pig's wife went on with the others.

By now, although only a few minutes had passed, the village was in ruins and the straw roofs and wooden beams were blazing. Everybody was gone. As they passed they had

shrieked at old Mrs. Wang to come on, and she had called back pleasantly:

"I'm coming — I'm coming!"

But she did not go. She sat quite alone watching now what was an extraordinary spectacle. For soon other planes came, from where she did not know, but they attacked the first ones. The sun came up over the fields of ripening wheat, and in the clear summery air the planes wheeled and darted and spat at each other. When this was over, she thought, she would go back into the village and see if anything was left. Here and there a wall stood, supporting a roof. She could not see her own house from here. But she was not unused to war. Once bandits had looted their village, and houses had been burned then, too. Well, now it had happened again. Burning houses one could see often, but not this darting silvery shining battle in the air. She understood none of it — not what those things were, nor how they stayed up in the sky. She simply sat, growing hungry, and watching.

"I'd like to see one close," she said aloud. And at that moment, as though in answer, one of them pointed suddenly downward, and, wheeling and twisting as though it were wounded, it fell head down in a field which Little Pig had ploughed only yesterday for soybeans. And in an instant the sky was empty again, and there was only this wounded thing on the ground and herself.

She hoisted herself carefully from the earth. At her age she need be afraid of nothing. She could, she decided, go and see what it was. So, leaning on her bamboo pipe, she made her way slowly across the fields. Behind her in the sudden stillness two or three village dogs appeared and followed, creeping close to her in their terror. When they drew near to the fallen plane, they barked furiously. Then she hit them with her pipe.

"Be quiet," she scolded, "there's already been noise enough to split my ears!"

She tapped the airplane.

"Metal," she told the dogs. "Silver, doubtless," she added. Melted up, it would make them all rich.

She walked around it, examining it closely. What made it fly? It seemed dead. Nothing moved or made a sound within

it. Then, coming to the side to which it tipped, she saw a young man in it, slumped into a heap in a little seat. The dogs growled, but she struck at them again and they fell back.

"Are you dead?" she inquired politely.

The young man moved a little at her voice, but did not speak. She drew nearer and peered into the hole in which he sat. His side was bleeding.

"Wounded!" she exclaimed. She took his wrist. It was warm, but inert, and when she let it go, it dropped against the side of the hole. She stared at him. He had black hair and a dark skin like a Chinese and still he did not look like a Chinese.

He must be a Southerner, she thought. Well, the chief thing was, he was alive.

"You had better come out," she remarked. "I'll put some herb plaster on your side."

The young man muttered something dully.

"What did you say?" she asked. But he did not say it again.

I am still quite strong, she decided after a moment. So she reached in and seized him about the waist and pulled him out slowly, panting a good deal. Fortunately he was rather a little fellow and very light. When she had him on the ground, he seemed to find his feet; and he stood shakily and clung to her, and she held him up.

"Now if you can walk to my house," she said, "I'll see if it is there." Then he said something, quite clearly. She listened and could not understand a word of it. She pulled away from him and stared.

"What's that?" she asked.

He pointed at the dogs. They were standing growling, their ruffs up. Then he spoke again, and as he spoke he crumpled to the ground. The dogs fell on him, so that she had to beat them off with her hands.

"Get away!" she shouted. "Who told you to kill him?"

And then, when they had slunk back, she heaved him somehow onto her back; and, trembling, half carrying, half pulling him, she dragged him to the ruined village and laid him in the street while she went to find her house, taking the dogs with her.

Her house was quite gone. She found the place easily enough. This was where it should be, opposite the water gate



into the dike. She had always watched that gate herself. Miraculously it was not injured now, nor was the dike broken. It would be easy enough to rebuild the house. Only, for the present, it was gone.

So she went back to the young man. He was lying as she had left him, propped against the dike, panting and very pale. He had opened his coat and he had a little bag from which he was taking out strips of cloth and a bottle of something. And again he spoke, and again she understood nothing. Then he made signs and she saw it was water he wanted, so she took up a broken pot from one of many blown about the street, and, going up the dike, she filled it with river water and brought it down again and washed his wound, and she tore off the strips he made from the rolls of bandaging. He knew how to put the cloth over the gaping wound and he made signs to her, and she followed these signs. All the time he was trying to tell her something, but she could understand nothing.

"You must be from the south, sir," she said. It was easy to see that he had education. He looked very clever. "I have heard your language is different from ours." She laughed a little to put him at his ease, but he only stared at her sombrely with dull eyes. So she said brightly, "Now if I could find something for us to eat, it would be nice."

He did not answer. Indeed he lay back, panting still more heavily, and stared into space as though she had not spoken.

"You would be better with food," she went on. "And so would I," she added. She was beginning to feel unbearably hungry.

It occurred to her that in Wang, the baker's shop, there might be some bread. Even if it were dusty with fallen mortar, it would still be bread. She would go and see. But before she went she moved the soldier a little so that he lay in the edge of shadow cast by a willow tree that grew in the bank of the dike. Then she went to the baker's shop. The dogs were gone.

The baker's shop was, like everything else, in ruins. No one was there. At first she saw nothing but the mass of crumpled earthen walls. But then she remembered that the oven was just inside the door, and the doorframe still stood erect, supporting one end of the roof. She stood in this frame,

and, running her hand in underneath the fallen roof inside, she felt the wooden cover of the iron caldron. Under this there might be steamed bread. She worked her arm delicately and carefully in. It took quite a long time, but, even so, clouds of lime and dust almost choked her. Nevertheless she was right. She squeezed her hand under the cover and felt the firm smooth skin of the big steamed bread rolls, and one by one she drew out four.

"It's hard to kill an old thing like me," she remarked cheerfully to no one, and she began to eat one of the rolls as she walked back. If she had a bit of garlic and a bowl of tea — but one couldn't have everything in these times.

It was at this moment that she heard voices. When she came in sight of the soldier, she saw surrounding him a crowd of other soldiers, who had apparently come from nowhere. They were staring down at the wounded soldier, whose eyes were now closed.

"Where did you get this Japanese, Old Mother?" they shouted.

"What Japanese?" she asked, coming to them.



"This one!" they shouted.

"Is he a Japanese?" she cried in the greatest astonishment.

"But he looks like us — his eyes are black, his skin —"

"Japanese!" one of them shouted at her.

"Well," she said quietly, he dropped out of the sky."

"Give me that bread!" another shouted.

"Take it," she said, "all except this one for him."

"A Japanese monkey eat good bread" the soldier shouted.

"I suppose he is hungry also," old Mrs. Wang replied. She began to dislike these men. But then, she had always disliked soldiers.

"I wish you would go away," she said. "What are you doing here? Our village has always been peaceful."

"It certainly looks very peaceful now," one of the men said, grinning, "as peaceful as a grave. Do you know who did that, Old Mother? The Japanese!"

"I suppose so," she agreed. Then she asked, "Why? That's what I don't understand."

"Why? Because they want our land, that's why!"

"Our land!" she repeated. "Why, they can't have our land!"

"Never!" they shouted.

But all this time while they were talking and chewing the bread they had divided among themselves, they were watching the eastern horizon.

"Why do you keep looking east?" old Mrs. Wang now asked.

"The Japanese are coming from there," the man replied who had taken the bread.

"Are you running away from them?" she asked, surprised.

"There are only a handful of us," he said apologetically.

"We were left to guard a village — Pao An, in the county of —"

"I know that village," old Mrs. Wang interrupted. "You needn't tell me. I was a girl there. How is the old Pao who keeps the tea shop in the main street? He's my brother."

"Everybody is dead there," the man replied. "The Japanese have taken it — a great army of men came with their foreign guns and tanks, so what could we do?"

"Of course, only run," she agreed. Nevertheless she felt dazed and sick. So he was dead, that one brother she had left! She was now the last of her father's family.

But the soldiers were straggling away again leaving her alone.

"They'll be coming, those little black dwarfs," they were saying. "We'd best go on."

Nevertheless, one lingered a moment, the one who had taken the bread, to stare down at the young wounded man, who lay with his eyes shut, not having moved at all.

"Is he dead?" he inquired. Then, before Mrs. Wang could answer, he pulled a short knife out of his belt. "Dead or not, I'll give him a punch or two with this —"

But old Mrs. Wang pushed his arm away.

"No, you won't," she said with authority. "If he is dead, then there is no use in sending him into purgatory all in pieces. I am a good Buddhist myself."

The man laughed. "Oh well, he is dead," he answered; and then seeing his comrades already at a distance, he ran after them.

A Japanese, was he? Old Mrs. Wang, left alone with this inert figure, looked at him tentatively. He was very young, she could see, now that his eyes were closed. His hand, limp in unconsciousness, looked like a boy's hand, unformed and still growing. She felt his wrist but could discern no pulse. She leaned over him and held to his lips the half of her roll which she had not eaten.

"Eat," she said very loudly and distinctly. "Bread!"

But there was no answer. Evidently he was dead. He must have died while she was getting the bread out of the oven.

There was nothing to do then but to finish the bread herself. And when that was done, she wondered if she ought not to follow after Little Pig and his wife and all the villagers. The sun was mounting and it was growing hot. If she were going, she had better go. But first she would climb the dike and see what the direction was. They had gone straight west, and as far as eye could look westward was a great plain. She might even see a good-sized crowd miles away. Anyway, she could see the next village, and they might all be there.

So she climbed the dike slowly, getting very hot. There was a slight breeze on top of the dike and it felt good. She was shocked to see the river very near the top of the dike. Why, it had risen in the last hour!

"You old demon!" she said severely. Let the river god hear it if he liked. He was evil, that he was — so to threaten flood when there had been all this other trouble.

She stooped and bathed her cheeks and her wrists. The water was quite cold, as though with fresh rains somewhere. Then she stood up and gazed around her. To the west there was nothing except in the far distance the soldiers still half running, and beyond them the blur of the next village, which stood on a long rise of ground. She had better set out for that village. Doubtless Little Pig and his wife were waiting for her.

Just as she was about to climb down and start out, she saw something on the eastern horizon. It was at first only an immense cloud of dust. But, as she stared at it, very quickly it became a lot of black dots and shining spots. Then she saw what it was. It was a lot of men — an army. Instantly she knew what army.

That's the Japanese, she thought. Yes, above them were the buzzing silver planes. They circled about, seeming to search for someone.

"I don't know who you're looking for," she muttered, "unless it's me and Little Pig and his wife. We're the only ones left. You've already killed my brother Pao."

She had almost forgotten that Pao was dead. Now she remembered it acutely. He had such a nice shop — always clean, and the tea good and the best meat dumplings to be had and the price always the same. Pao was a good man. Besides, what about his wife and his seven children? Doubtless they were all killed, too. Now these Japanese were looking for her. It occurred to her that on the dike she could easily be seen. So she clambered hastily down.

It was when she was about halfway down that she thought of the water gate. This old river — it had been a curse to them since time began. Why should it not make up a little now for all the wickedness it had done? It was plotting wickedness again, trying to steal over its banks. Well, why not? She wavered a moment. It was a pity, of course, that the young dead Japanese would be swept into the flood. He was a nice-looking boy, and she had saved him from being stabbed. It was not quite the same as saving his life, of course, but still it was a little the same. If he had been alive, he would have been saved. She went over to him and tugged at him until he lay well near the top of the bank. Then she went down again.

She knew perfectly how to open the water gate. Any child knew how to open the sluice for crops. But she knew also how to swing open the whole gate. The question was, could she open it quickly enough to get out of the way?

"I'm only one old woman," she muttered. She hesitated a second more. Well, it would be a pity not to see what sort of a baby Little Pig's wife would have, but one could not see everything. She had seen a great deal in this life. There was an end to what one could see anyway.

She glanced again to the east. There were the Japanese coming across the plain. They were a long clear line of black, dotted with thousands of glittering points. If she opened this gate, the impetuous water would roar toward them, rushing into the plains, rolling into a wide lake, drowning them, maybe. Certainly they could not keep on marching nearer and nearer to her and to Little Pig and his wife who were waiting for her. Well, Little Pig and his wife — they would wonder about her — but they would never dream of this. It would make a good story — she would have enjoyed telling it.

She turned resolutely to the gate. Well, some people fought with airplanes and some with guns, but you could fight with a river, too, if it were a wicked one like this one. She wrenched out a huge wooden pin. It was slippery with silvery green moss. The rill of water burst into a strong jet. When she wrenched one more pin, the rest would give way themselves. She began pulling at it, and felt it slip a little from its hole.

I might be able to get myself out of purgatory with this, she thought, and maybe they'll let me have that old man of mine, too. What's a hand of his to all this? Then we'll —

The pin slipped away suddenly, and the gate burst flat against her and knocked her breath away. She had only time to gasp, to the river:

"Come on, you old demon!"

Then she felt it seize her and lift her up to the sky. It was beneath her and around her. It rolled her joyfully hither and thither, and then, holding her close and enfolded, it went rushing against the enemy.

**Glossary**

<b>eaves</b>	: overhanging edges of a roof
<b>disconcerting</b>	: upsetting
<b>willows</b>	: kinds of trees and shrubs with thin, easily bent branches
<b>straggled</b>	: grew, spread in an irregular or untidy manner
<b>deprecatingly</b>	: expressing disapproval of
<b>wheedle</b>	: make oneself pleasant to someone or flatter or coax to get something one wants
<b>dike</b>	: a long wall of earth to prevent flooding
<b>sluice</b>	: a sliding gate or other device for controlling the flow of water
<b>impetuous</b>	: moving forcefully or rapidly
<b>rill</b>	: small stream, rivulet
<b>wrenched</b>	: pulled suddenly and violently

**Comprehension**

1. Why was Mrs. Wang more afraid of the river than the Japanese soldiers?
2. The Wangs had never seen a Japanese but were always talking about them. Why?
3. Why was the dike a special place for Mrs. Wang?
4. How had the river struck Mrs. Wang in her personal life?
5. Describe Mrs. Wang's concern about her husband.
6. What was Mrs. Wang's idea of resolving the issues concerning wars and disputes?
7. What was Mrs. Wang's reaction when the Japanese actually attacked.
8. What was the old woman's attitude towards the wounded soldier?
9. Why did Mrs. Wang open the flood gates of the river?
10. Why did Mrs. Wang eventually call the river by saying, "Come on, you old demon"?

**Appreciation**

1. The Yellow River had played a significant role in Mrs. Wang's life. Elaborate.
2. Substantiate your answer with examples from the text to show that Mrs. Wang had immense faith in humanity.

3. Describe Mrs. Wang's thoughts when she saw the Japanese soldiers coming from the eastern horizon.
4. The river was like a demon for the Wangs but it turned out to be their saviour. How?
5. Language is no barrier if one wishes to communicate. Elucidate.
6. Fellow feeling is the life-line of humanity. Explain.

**For Discussion**

War has no victors.

**Suggested Reading**

*The Frill* by Pearl S. Buck

*Life of Ma Parker* by Katherine Mansfield

*Model Millionaire* by Oscar Wilde





## Youth and the Tasks Ahead

*Dr. Karan Singh (1931- ) is an author of distinction. He is known for his books on philosophy and political science. He has also written a number of poems and travelogues. The collection of his writings called One Man's World and his Autobiography have been widely acclaimed. In this address to the youth he urges them to realise their responsibility towards the country.*

OUR FREEDOM was won with great struggle and sacrifice after centuries of servitude to foreign rule, and it is important that those of us who belong to the post-independence generation should not fall into the error of taking our freedom for granted. The maintenance and strengthening of freedom is a task even more onerous than its attainment.

In any nation the youth necessarily forms the vanguard in most spheres of activity, and it is essential that at this critical juncture its power must be mobilised further to strengthen our integrity and our capacity to resist aggression. What is required is an immense burst of idealism and energy among our youth, who must be deeply committed to the task of safeguarding this great nation of ours founded on the twin ideals of secularism and democracy. In particular our young

men and women studying in schools, colleges and universities have a special responsibility, for while they are no longer children they have yet not got fully involved in the routine of adult life. They constitute an immense reservoir of strength which, if properly canalised, can prove to be a source of great power to the nation. Indeed it is these young Indians who will soon be called upon to provide leadership in all walks of national life, and they must train themselves to fulfil their future responsibilities with distinction.

I would like to address a few words in particular to our young men and women. If they are to be effective in the service of the nation, it is essential that they must fit themselves in every way for this task. The building up of a vast and pulsating democratic nation is no mean undertaking, and a mere desire to be of service is not enough; it must be accompanied by the ability to do so effectively.

There are several distinct dimensions in which our youth must equip itself. The first is the physical. Building a great democracy and defending it from predatory aggressors requires a young generation that is physically strong, with muscles of iron and nerves of steel, and for this it must equip itself by undertaking physical training and developing physical fitness to the maximum extent possible. Despite technological advances and mechanisation, defence is still, to a large extent, a matter of dogged physical endurance and courage as our Officers and Jawans have so magnificently proved on the field of battle and they emerged victorious against superior and more sophisticated war equipment. In this context the National Cadet Corps, the Physical Fitness Scheme, and other similar organisations play valuable role in building up the strength of our youth, and these opportunities must be fully availed of. Along with physical fitness the qualities of discipline and teammanship are essential, particularly for those planning to join the proud ranks of our defence forces, because what is required is not only individual achievement but corporate progress.

The second dimension is the intellectual. We live in a highly competitive age of science and technology, and can no longer afford the luxury of mediocrity if we are to forge ahead. This rapidly changing nuclear age requires our youth to be intellectually far more alert and competent than their

predecessors, and therefore every young man and woman today studying in schools, colleges and universities must aim at academic ability of the highest order. In a developing nation like ours, where large numbers are still unable to acquire even primary education, those undergoing higher education constitute a privileged elite. They must, therefore, repay their debt to society by not wasting a single moment of academic life in futile or disruptive pursuits, but strain every nerve to become able and efficient in their respective fields of study so that they can serve India with greater efficiency. In this context the futility of students getting involved in party politics and intrigues is too obvious to need any reiteration.

The third is the dimension of patriotism. I am concerned here not so much with the routine meaning of this term as with that deeper patriotism which transcends all pettiness and exclusivism, and creates in our youth a deep urge for national unity and progress. This alone can eradicate corruption and nepotism from our land and galvanise our whole process of economic development, which is so crucial to the success of our democracy. The youth of a nation is always the fountainhead of its idealism, and our young men and women must have a full realisation that it is up to them to provide a new moral impetus to India at this crucial juncture in her history as a free nation. In this context I cannot resist the temptation to quote from a speech delivered over half a century ago by one of our great nationalist leaders, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, to students of the Bengal National College. He said:

"There are times in a nation's history when Providence, places before it one work, one aim, to which everything else, however high and noble in itself, has to be sacrificed. Such a time has now arrived for our Motherland when nothing is dearer than her service, when everything else is to be directed to that end. If you will study, study for her sake; train yourselves body and mind and soul for her service. You will earn your living that you may do service to her. Work that she may prosper. Suffer that she may rejoice."

All is contained in that one single advice. How superbly relevant to our present condition are these stirring words.

Finally, there is the spiritual dimension which, indeed, is the main faculty that distinguishes human beings from the

myriad other forms of life that exist on this planet. At a time of deep crisis we must be endowed with a new spiritual fervour leading to that fearlessness and dynamism whereby we can overcome all difficulties. When I speak of spirituality I am not referring merely to denominational religion, howsoever inspiring that may be. Ours is a nation that has from time immemorial cradled an immense variety of religions, and today in free India people belonging to all faiths live together in peace and harmony. What I am referring to is that golden thread of unity which runs through all religions and from which they all ultimately derive power and sustenance. This implies the acceptance of the divinity inherent in every human being, and of the noble goal of spiritual growth and realisation, a concept that at once raises the dignity of the individual and cuts across all narrow barriers and distinctions. Indeed the principle of individual divinity and spiritual evolution is one which transcends even national barriers, and it alone can give us the courage to fight for our freedom and integrity with undying valour, and the wisdom to do so without hatred.

The physical, intellectual, patriotic and spiritual, then, are dimensions in which our young men and women must equip themselves so that they can really be of effective service to the nation. Needless to say this is a continuing process, and the very act of national service itself helps to develop these capacities. What is required on the part of our youths is a keen sense of participation in what Jawaharlal Nehru used to call "the great adventure of nation-building". There is no room here for cynicism or defeatism, boredom or depression. In whatever position our youth may find themselves, there are always numerous avenues for national service. These may not be such as to hit newspaper headlines, but it is solid and devoted activity multiplied a million-fold that truly builds the fabric of a great nation.

There remains the important question of the opportunity, which we must provide to our youth for serving the nation at this crucial juncture. There is so much to be done: civil defence measures to be strengthened in urban as well as rural areas; a network of nursing, first-aid and blood-bank centres to be established; the welfare of our brave security forces who have sacrificed so much on the battlefield to be furthered; the dependents of those who made the supreme sacrifice to be

helped and comforted; communal harmony to be maintained; the whole process of economic development and reconstruction to be speeded up; the vast areas of poverty and ignorance that still exist to be cleared; the fabric of our democratic society to be strengthened. These and a thousand other problems confront us today. Surely it should not be beyond our ingenuity to organise a vast national youth movement which, transcending all political, communal, regional and linguistic diversities, can mobilise our youth for the noble task of defending and developing free India, and canalise the mighty upsurge of patriotism that we have witnessed in recent days.

The younger generation today faces challenges graver than any with which their forefathers were confronted. What is at stake is nothing less than whether a secular and democratic nation, founded on the principles of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, can survive in this nuclear age. Destiny has given us the privilege of providing the answer to this momentous question, and I am confident that when the history of this turbulent era comes to be recorded our young men and women will not have been found wanting.

**DR. KARAN SINGH**

### Glossary

<b>onerous</b>	: great effort (involving a task, duty or responsibility)
<b>vanguard</b>	: a guard against surprise attack
<b>pulsating</b>	: vibrating
<b>dogged</b>	: stubborn, obstinate
<b>forge</b>	: move forward
<b>denominational</b>	: relating to or according to the principles of a particular religious group.
<b>nepotism</b>	: undue patronage to one's relations
<b>galvanise</b>	: strengthen
<b>impetus</b>	: driving force
<b>myriad</b>	: great number
<b>cynicism</b>	: sarcastically doubting human sincerity and merit
<b>ingenuity</b>	: the quality of being clever, original and inventive

**momentous** : of great importance or significance, especially in its bearing on the future

### Comprehension

1. What, according to the author, is the task that requires great effort on the part of the youth?
2. Mention the 'twin ideals' of our nation. How can they be sustained?
3. Why, according to the author, should the young generation be physically strong? And how?
4. Why is there a need for the youth in this nuclear age to be academically inclined?
5. How, according to the author, is patriotism crucial for the progress of the nation?
6. What advice did Sri Aurobindo Ghosh give to the youth of the nation?
7. What distinguishes human beings from other forms of life? And how does it help in overcoming narrow barriers? Illustrate from the text.
8. How, according to the author, can the youth serve the nation?

### Appreciation

1. The younger generation is at the threshold of facing more challenges than their forefathers. Comment.
2. 'Muscles of iron and nerves of steel' is the need of the hour for the youth. Explain.
3. The youth of a nation is always 'the fountain head of its idealism.' Explain.
4. What is expected of those who belong to the post-independence era?
5. Describe briefly the dimensions that the youth should equip themselves with.

### For Discussion

Patriotism is at a low-ebb in today's world.

### Suggested Reading

*The Five Kinds of Workers* by Row and Wren

*Opportunity for Youth* by Jawaharlal Nehru

*India 2020: A Vision for the New Millennium* by A.P.J Abdul Kalam

## Another World

*Verrier Elwin (1902–1964), was greatly influenced by Indian philosophy and by Rabindranath Tagore's writings. He took keen interest in the Indian culture while he was a student at Oxford. He came to India in 1927 and started living with the tribals in order to understand their life style and culture. He wrote numerous monographs and books on the Indian tribes. The following write up is a description of the tribes of the North Eastern region of India.*

"Our problem being to form the future, we can only form it on the materials of the past; we must use our heredity, instead of denying it."

T. S. ELIOT

WHEN, NEARLY three hundred years ago, Mir Jumla invaded Assam, he was accompanied by two writers who have left their impressions of the strange and terrible country, which finally succeeded in expelling them. One was Shihabuddin, also known as Talish, the other was 'that master of eloquence', Mulla Darvish of Herat, who composed an ode about his experience. Talish praises the courage of the Ahoms and the splendour of their palaces. Both writers, however, appear to have been impressed above all else by the 'otherness' of the country, and the Mulla says that it is 'another world'—

Its land is not like our land, its sky is not like our sky.  
 Its sky sends rain down without the originating cause of  
 clouds;  
 On its ground the green grass sprouts up without any  
 aid from the soil.  
 It stands outside the circle of the Earth and the bowels of  
 the enveloping Sphere.  
 It has been separated from the world, like the letter *aliph*.  
 The seasons all begin here at the time of their conclusion  
 elsewhere.  
 Here there is heat in our winter and chill in our summer.  
 Its rivers are beyond limit and estimate like the minds of  
 the wise.

These verses are, of course, no longer applicable to Assam proper, but they may still be used to describe the frontier which, until India attained her independence, had indeed been separated from the world like the *aliph*, which cannot be joined to any letter that follows and to only a few of those that precede it. Its climate is contrary: its streams and rivers, beyond limit and estimate, divide tribe from tribe: although the Government is now opening up communications, many of its paths are hard to traverse; it is an area of adventure and enormous potentialities.

It is also an area of great beauty. William Robinson describes its scenery in the florid language of his day (1841):

"Mountains beyond mountains, hurled together in wild confusion, seem to the spectator like the wrecks of a ruined world; and whilst the eye is gratified with the pleasing panorama, a series of hills innumerable is presented to view, retiring far away in fine perspective, till their blue conical summits are relieved by the proud pinnacles of the Himalayas towering their lofty magazines of tempests and snow midway up to the vertex of the sky, and exhibiting scenes calculated to animate the mind with the sublimest sentiments, and to awaken the most lofty recollections."

The snow-clad mountains all along the northern boundary, the river scenery of Siang, the pines and rhododendrons of Kameng, the austere grandeur of the Lohit Valley, the splendid uplands of the Patkoi, the gentle woods and fields of the



Apa Tani plateau make the traveller feel as if 'the spray of an inexhaustible fountain of beauty' was blown into his face. The harshness of life on the one hand and the grandeur and loveliness of its setting on the other has had its effect on the character of the people. They are courageous in facing and overcoming difficulties and they are lovers of fine, strong and beautiful things.



The great tract of some 30,500 square miles under the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA)<sup>1</sup> administration may conveniently be divided into three main artistic and cultural provinces. The people of the first are Buddhist by religion.

The second cultural area stretches from west to east, from Sepila to Kameng and through the greater part of the Subansiri, Siang and Lohit Frontier Divisions. It is populated by tribes of very varying traditions, yet united culturally in their attachment to weaving, the absence of wood-carving, and a stress on fine work in cane and bamboo.

1. In place of NEFA now there are seven states in north-east India: Assam, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur.

The third cultural area is to the south-east. Here, in the Tirap Frontier Division, are the Noctes, who are Vaishnavite by religion, the Wanchos, a brave independent people, and the gentle Tangsas. The Tangsa groups, in fact, have many contacts across the border, inter-marry with the Burmese tribes, and do their hair and dress in a vaguely Burmese manner. The Noctes and Wanchos were formerly head-hunters; they build morungs for their young men, and substantial houses for their Chiefs; their art expresses itself in wood-carving and personal decoration. Dalton said of them in 1872 that 'in fantastic eccentricity of costume' they took the lead of all the tribes. "Their love of decoration is only equalled by their antipathy to clothing. They study ornamentation and manage to produce a very picturesque effect. The materials chiefly used are shell, ivory, boar's tusks, beads of agate and other pebbles, goat's hair dyed scarlet and other colours, brass and glass." South of Tirap is Tuensang, where the Phomes and Konyaks also excel in an art of wood-carving connected with their old head-hunting tradition. But although the three main cultural provinces and individual tribes have their special characteristics, they all have a great deal in common.

Religion is of a type common throughout tribal India, that is to say, there is a very general belief in a Supreme God who is just, benevolent and good, the witness of truth. Tribal religion is associated with a social ethic that unites the people in its discipline and undoubtedly fosters the characteristic tribal virtues of order, self-reliance, fidelity, generosity and hospitality, truthfulness and kindness. They also believe that beneath this mighty ruler of the unseen world there is a host of demons who prey upon mankind and to whose pacification most of the attention of the tribal priests and shamans is devoted. Such priests, who may be men or women, are of considerable authority and have the task not only of appeasing the demons and ghosts of the dead but also of deciding through divination such matters as the allocation of fields for cultivation, the auspicious moment for sowing their seed or the discovery of stolen cattle and goods.

Religion also lends its sanction to the origin of the arts. The Boris of Siang say that at the beginning of the world it

was only Doini-Pollo, the Sun-Moon God, who knew how to make cloth. He taught the art to a female Wiyu or spirit and she, flattered by a rich sacrifice presented to her by Abu Tani, the ancestor of the tribe, came in a dream to his wife and showed her how to weave.

The Kaman Mishmis of the Lohit Valley have a significant story about the origin of weaving.

"Originally people did not wear clothes, for they did not know how to weave. The first weaver was a girl named Hambrumai, who was taught the art by the god Matai. She sat by the river and watched the waves and ripples on its surface and imitated them in her designs. She lay in the forest looking up at the patterns woven by the branches of trees, the leaves of the bamboo; she saw ferns and plants and flowers, and from these things learnt other designs. Her work was as beautiful as her face.

"But one day Hairum, the Porcupine, saw her cloth and came to steal it from her cave. The entrance was too small for him. So he pushed the rock into the river and the girl was crushed beneath it. Her loom was broken to pieces and carried down by the stream to the plains and the people there found them and learnt to weave. The designs turned to butterflies, and in the markings on their wings you can still see today the patterns she made."

Another story about Hambrumai comes from the Khamlang Valley.

"In the Khamlang River lived a fish called hambru; she had flowers on her body, and with her was a snake of three colours, red, white and blue — these colours are reflected in the clouds.

"There was an orphan boy called Kowonsa, who was very fond of fishing, but he had to work so hard in the fields that he had little opportunity for it. But one day he set his traps in a stream saying, 'If it is my destiny to get any fish, they will come to me of their own accord.' The next morning he found two hambru fish, one large and one small, in his trap and knew that he was favoured by the gods.

"Kowonsa put the small fish on the fire and roasted and ate it. But the big fish was so pretty that he hid her in a gourd and kept her in his house. The next day he went to

work and when he returned he found his little hut filled with lovely cloth patterned with the scales of a fish and the markings of a snake. This went on for some time; he fed his fish every day, went out to work and when he returned he found more and more cloth in the house. One day he hid nearby and presently saw the fish come out of the gourd and turn into a girl with long hair, carrying a loom on which she quickly wove many pieces of cloth.

"Kowonsa took her as his wife and she taught all the women of that place how to weave. When they asked her how she herself had learnt the patterns, she said, "When I was a fish I looked at the snake in the river and copied the marks on its body, and I followed its colours reflected in the clouds." Kowonsa put some of the cloth out in the sun and the wind blew it away to other villages and the people there also learnt to weave. The gods Bronmai and Mollo learnt the designs from Hambrumai and went about the world teaching everybody how to weave. After Hambrumai died, they took the sword from her loom and made it into a diamond pattern. This is why there are so many diamonds on the Mishmi cloth."

For the Minyongs and Ashings the traditional inventor of implements is Ninur-Botte, who was the first ironsmith and maker of ornaments. The Shimongs call him Besi-Ada or Ningnu-Botte: he made the first beads and persuaded the woodpecker to cut holes in them. In a Singpho story the first craftsman is a man named Intupwa. He tried, unsuccessfully, to cut wood with sharp stones and went to search for iron. He first asked the trees where he could get it, but the trees replied, "If we tell you, you will make a dao and cut us down." Then he asked the grasses and they made the same reply. He asked the wild animals and they said, "If we tell you, you will make iron-tipped arrows and kill us." At last he asked the water, which sent him to a certain goddess who gave birth to a baby-girl, at first red as fire but later black as iron. Intupwa broke her to pieces and took the iron home. But he did not know how to work it until he learnt how to make a stone hammer by watching an elephant's feet crushing everything beneath them. He learnt how to make a pair of tongs when a crab caught him with its claws, and after that he began to make daos, knives and arrow-heads.

One of the chief inspirations for the other arts is the dance, itself the art in which the tribal people find supreme expression of their sense of order, rhythm and delight. To most of the frontier tribes, moreover, the dance is something more than recreation; it is a very serious business. The Monpas, Khambas and Sherdkpens perform their pantomimes, not for show, but at festivals to teach important moral lessons and to bring prosperity or avert disease. The Wanchos and Noctes dance to celebrate victory in war, to encourage the crops to grow and when they bring in the harvest, to give colour to a great feast, to bestow blessings at a wedding. The Mishini priests dance at the time of sacrifice or funeral and for their festivals. The Adis, who have a strongly developed sense of the dance as recreation, also have their ritual dances at which the epics of their race are sung.

This naturally stimulates every form of artistic creation. The dancers put on their best skirts and coats, bring out their finest hats, decorate spears and daos, paint fresh designs on shields, and cover themselves with ornaments, from precious traditional beads to flowers and strips of greenery. The wooden heads and figures popular in Tuesang and Tirap are brought out now, even if they have remained hidden for months, and masks are prepared and painted with fresh colours.

There is little religious ceremonies at weddings, but these too are occasions for colour and display. Carefully preserved cloth and ornaments are brought out and worn; the Noctes, whose ordinary dress is undistinguished, make a good show at a wedding.

Cowries are often used for decoration. The Akas use them on their sashes; the Boris and Ashings on their belts; the Phoms, Khienmungans and Changs have a broad cowrie-belt, with a brass disc in front; the Konyaks work cowries into their textiles; aprons of cowries are made by the Sangtams, Semas and others; cowrie gauntlets are worn by warriors. Cowries are less used in Tirap, perhaps because they are not available, but may be found in the Wancho brass belt and the Nocte apron, one of the few colourful survivals from an earlier time: it is made of woven goat's hair which is dyed in an attractive brick-red with tassels hanging from it.

The people of this frontier have a wonderful instinct for ornamentation. The armlets of ivory or polished wood, the leggings of red cane, the strings of conch shells and beads, the ear-ornaments of red and black seeds, the splendid hats, the baskets adorned with wooden figures and tassels of shredded bamboo tied up with red and black bands, suggest a sense of grace and colour in a world that is everywhere turning to the conventional and the drab.

Here is a richness and a variety, which reflect a real joy in living and must not be allowed to die.

"To my many good friends among the Chiefs and people, I have only one message. Guard the national soul of your race and never be tempted to despise your past. Therein, I believe, lies the sure hope that your sons and daughters will one day make their own original contribution to knowledge and progress." R.S.Rattray.

VERRIER ELWIN

### Glossary

<b>eloquence</b>	: skillful use of language
<b>aliph</b>	: first letter of the Urdu, Persian and Arabic alphabets
<b>panorama</b>	: a vivid, unbroken view of the surrounding region
<b>pinnacles</b>	: high pointed peaks of a mountain
<b>magazines</b>	: chambers containing cartridges in a gun
<b>tempests</b>	: violent storms
<b>vertex</b>	: the highest point; the top
<b>rhododendrons</b>	: a shrub or a small tree with large clusters of trumpet-shaped flowers with evergreen leaves
<b>morungs</b>	: dormitories/rooms with sleeping accommodation
<b>antipathy</b>	: a deep feeling of aversion
<b>mithun</b>	: a kind of an ox/buffalo
<b>shamans</b>	: a person regarded as having access to the world of good and evil spirits
<b>nettle</b>	: a plant which has rough leaves and stinging hair
<b>gourd</b>	: a large, fleshy, hardskinned fruit; (here) rind of the fruit emptied, dried and used as a container

<b>dao</b>	: a long and sharp knife
<b>pantomime</b>	: a theatrical entertainment based on facial expressions and gestures accompanied by music
<b>cowries</b>	: a smooth, glossy shell with a long and narrow opening
<b>gauntlets</b>	: gloves with a long loose wrist

### Comprehension

1. What impression did Talish and Mulla have about the Lohit Valley?
2. How does William Robinson describe the valley?
3. Why does the author say that the valley 'has had its effect on the character of the people'?
4. On what basis does the author divide the North-East region?
5. How do the people of the valley connect their art with religion?
6. What is the story about the origin of weaving as believed by the Kaman Mishimis of the Lohit Valley?
7. How were the traditional implements and other crafts invented by the tribals?

### Appreciation

1. Illustrate with examples that women of the Lohit Valley were the pioneers in weaving.
2. The proximity of the tribals with nature is reflected in their lives. Explain.
3. 'Dance is the art form in which the tribal people find supreme expression of their sense of order, rhythm and delight'. Elucidate.
4. 'The people of this frontier have a wonderful instinct for ornamentation'. Elaborate.
5. 'Here is a richness and a variety which reflect a real joy in living, and must not be allowed to die'. Justify the statement.

### For Discussion

Functions organised on cultural festivals are a true reflection of our culture.

### Suggested Reading

*Life at Mokameh Ghat* by Jim Corbett

*The Ganga Descends* by Ruskin Bond

*After The Peak* by M.S. Kohli

# 6



## The Hour of Truth

*Percival Wilde (1887-1953) was known for his plays and detective stories. He also reviewed books for newspapers. Some of his famous works are Brothers, Little Shot, and First is Last. The Hour of Truth is from the volume entitled, A Question of Morality and Other Plays. This play is a striking psychological study on the corrupting influence of money on people.*

### Characters

Robert Baldwin  
Martha, his wife  
John, his son  
Evie, his daughter  
Mr. Marshall  
A Maid

The Scene: At Baldwin's

*[It is a rather hot and sultry Sunday afternoon, and the sun overhead and the baked clay underfoot are merciless. In the distance, lowering clouds give promise of coming relief. And at the parlour window of a trim little cottage the Baldwin family is anxiously awaiting the return of its head.*

*John, the son, an average young man of twenty-seven, is smoking a pipe as philosophically as if this day were in no whit*



more momentous than any other. But his mother, trying to compose herself with her knitting, has made little progress in the last half hour; and Evie, his sister, takes no pains to conceal her nervousness.

*There is a tense pause. It seems as if none of them likes to break the silence. For the tenth time in ten minutes, Evie, goes to the window and looks out along the sultry road.]*

MARTHA: It's time he was home.

EVIE: Yes, Mother.

MARTHA: I do hope he hasn't forgotten his umbrella; he has such a habit of leaving it behind him...

EVIE: Yes, Mother.

MARTHA: It might rain. Don't you think so, Evie?

*[Without waiting for an answer she goes to the window and looks out anxiously.]* The sky is so dark. *(She starts.)* There was a flash of lightning! *[JOHN rises slowly, moves to a centre table, and knocks the ashes out of his pipe. His mother turns to him.]* John, run into your father's room and see that the windows are closed. That's a good boy.

JOHN: Right-o. *[He goes.]*

EVIE *(after a pause)*: Mother. *[There is no answer.]* Mother! *[MRS. BALDWIN turns slowly.]* What does Mr. Gresham want with him? Has he done anything wrong?

MARTHA *(proudly)*: Your father? No, Evie.

EVIE: Then why did Mr. Gresham send for him?

MARTHA: He wanted to talk to him.

EVIE: What about? Mr. Gresham has been arrested; they're going to try him tomorrow. What can he want with Father?

MARTHA: Your father will have to give evidence.

EVIE: But he's going to give evidence against Mr. Gresham. Why should Mr. Gresham want to see him?

MARTHA: I don't know, Evie. You know, your father doesn't say much about his business affairs. *(She pauses.)* I didn't know there was anything wrong with the bank until I saw it in the papers. Your father wouldn't tell me to draw my money out — he thought it wasn't loyal to Mr. Gresham *(EVIE nods.)* I did it of my own accord — against his wishes — when I suspected...

EVIE (*after a pause*): Do you think that Father had anything to do with — with... [*She does not like to say it.*]

MARTHA: With the wrecking of the bank? You know him better than that, Evie.

EVIE: But did he know what was going on? You know what the papers are saying —

MARTHA: They haven't been fair to him, Evie.

EVIE: Perhaps not. But they said he must have been a fool not to know. They said that only he could have known — he and Mr. Gresham. Why didn't he stop it?

MARTHA: He was acting under Mr. Gresham's orders.

EVIE (*contemptuously*): Mr. Gresham's orders! Did he have to follow them?

MARTHA (*after a pause*): Evie, I don't believe your father ever did a wrong thing in his life — not if he knew it was wrong. He found out by accident — found out what Mr. Gresham was doing.

EVIE: How do you know that?

MARTHA: I don't know it; I suspect it — something he said. [*eagerly*] You see, Evie, he *can't* have done anything wrong. They haven't indicted him.

EVIE (*slowly*): No. They didn't indict him — because they want him to testify against Mr. Gresham. That's little consolation, Mother. [*John re-enters*]

MARTHA (*seizing the relief*): Were the windows open, John?

JOHN (*shortly*): I've closed them. [*He crosses to the table, takes up his pipe, and refills it.*] Look here, Mater; what does Gresham want with the governor?

EVIE (*nodding*): I've just been asking that.

MARTHA: I don't know, John.

JOHN: Didn't you ask him? [*As she does not answer*] Well?

MARTHA: Yes, I asked him. He didn't say, John. [*anxiously*] I don't think he knew himself.

JOHN (*after an instant's thought*): I was talking to the assistant cashier yesterday.

EVIE: Donovan?

JOHN: Yes, Donovan, I saw him up at the Athletic Club. He said that nobody had any idea that there was anything wrong until the crash came. Donovan had been there eight years. He thought he was taken care of for the

rest of his life. He had got married on the strength of it. And then, one morning, there was a sign up on the door. It was like a bolt out of a clear sky.

EVIE: And Father?

JOHN: He said the governor must have known. He'll swear nobody else did. You see, Father was closer to Gresham than anyone else. That puts him in a nice position, doesn't it?

MARTHA: What do you mean, John?

JOHN: The governor the only witness against John Gresham — and me named after him! John Gresham Baldwin, at your service!

MARTHA: Your father will do his duty, John, no matter what comes of it.

JOHN (*shortly*): I know it. And I'm not sure but what if it's right. [*They look at him inquiringly.*] There's John Gresham, grown rich in twenty years, and the governor pegging along as his secretary at sixty dollars a week!

MARTHA: Your father never complained.

JOHN: No; that's just the pity of it. He didn't complain. Well, he'll have his chance tomorrow. He'll go on the stand, and when he's through, they'll put John Gresham where he won't be able to hurt anybody for a while. Wasn't satisfied with underpaying his employees; had to rob his depositors! Serves him jolly well right!

MARTHA (*rather timidly*): I don't think your father would like you to talk that way, John.

JOHN (*shrugs his shoulders; speaks contemptuously*): Hmph!

MARTHA: Your father has nothing against Mr. Gresham. He will tell the truth—nothing but the truth.

JOHN: Did you think I expected him to lie? Not Father! He'll tell the truth; just the truth. It'll be plenty!

EVIE (*at the window*): There's Father now!

[*There is the click of a latchkey outside. EVIE makes for the door.*]

MARTHA: Evie! You stay here: let me talk to him first.

[*MARTHA hurries out. JOHN and EVIE look at each other.*]

JOHN: Wonder what Gresham had to say to him? [*EVIE shrugs her shoulders. He turns away to the window.*] It's started to rain.

Four. Noe

[There is a pause. Suddenly JOHN crosses to the door, and flings it open.]

JOHN: Hullo, Dad!

BALDWIN (*coming in, followed by MARTHA*): How are you, my boy? [*He shakes hands with JOHN.*] Evie! (*He kisses her.*)

MARTHA: You are sure your shoes aren't wet, Robert?

BALDWIN (*shaking his head*): I took the car. Not a drop on me. See? [*He passes his hands over his sleeves. He goes to a chair: sits. There is an awkward pause.*]

JOHN: Well, Dad? Don't you think it's about time you told us something?

BALDWIN: Told you something? I don't understand, John.

JOHN: People have been talking about you— saying things...

BALDWIN: What kind of things, John?

JOHN: You can imagine: rotten things. And I couldn't contradict them.

BALDWIN: Why not, John?

JOHN: Because I didn't know.

BALDWIN: Did you *have* to know? Wasn't it enough that you knew your father?

JOHN (*after a pause*): I beg your pardon, sir.

BALDWIN: It was only a day before the smash-up that I found out what Gresham was doing. [*He pauses. They are listening. Intently.*] I told him he would have to make good. He said he couldn't —

EVIE (*as he does not continue*): And what happened?

BALDWIN: I told him he would have to do the best he could— and the first step would be to close the bank. He didn't want to do that.

MARTHA: But he did it.

BALDWIN: I made him do it. He was angry — very angry, but I had the whip hand.

EVIE: The papers didn't mention that.

BALDWIN: I didn't think it was necessary to tell them.

MARTHA: But you let your name rest under a cloud mean while.

BALDWIN: It will be cleared tomorrow, won't it? [*He pauses.*] Today Gresham sent for me. The trial begins in twenty-four hours. I'm the only witness against him. He asked — you can guess what...

JOHN (*indignantly*): He wanted you to lie to save his skin, eh? Wanted you to perjure yourself?

BALDWIN: That wouldn't be necessary, John. He just wanted me to have an attack of poor memory. If I tell all I know, John Gresham will go to jail—no power on earth can save him from it. But he wants me to forget a little—just the essential things. When they question me I can answer, "I don't remember". They can't prove I do remember. And there you are.

JOHN: It would be a lie, Dad!

BALDWIN (*smiling*): Of course. But it's done every day. And they couldn't touch me—any more than they could convict him.

MARTHA (*quivering with indignation*): How dared he—how dared he ask such a thing—?

EVIE: What did you say, Father?

BALDWIN (*smiling, and raising his eyes to JOHN's*): Well, son, what would *you* have said?

JOHN: I'd have told him to go to the devil!

BALDWIN (*nodding*): I did.

JOHN: Bully for you, Governor!

MARTHA (*half to herself*): I knew! I knew!

BALDWIN: I didn't use your words, John. He's too old a friend of mine for that. But didn't mince matters any. He understood what I meant.

EVIE: And what did he say then?

BALDWIN: There wasn't much to say. You see, he wasn't surprised. He's known me for thirty-five years, and, well [*with simple pride*] anybody who's known me for thirty-five years doesn't expect me to haggle with my conscience. If it had been anybody else I would have struck him across the face. But John Gresham and I were boys together. We worked side by side. And I've been in his employ ever since he started in for himself. He is desperate — he doesn't know what he is doing — or he wouldn't have offered me money.

JOHN (*furious*): Offered you money, Dad?

BALDWIN: He'd put it aside, ready for the emergency. If they don't convict him, he'll hand it over to me. The law can't stop him. But if I live until tomorrow night, they will

convict him! *[He sighs.]* God knows I want no share in bringing about his punishment — *[He breaks off. Evie pats his hand silently]* Young man and old man, I've worked with him or for him the best part of my life. I'm loyal to him — I've always been loyal to him — but when John Gresham ceases to be an honest man, John Gresham and I part company!

MARTHA *(weeping softly)*: Robert! Robert!

BALDWIN: I've got only a few years to live, but I'll live those as I've lived the rest of my life. I'll go to my grave clean! *[He rises presently, goes to the window, and looks out.]* The rain's stopped, hasn't it?

EVIE *(following him and taking his hand)*: Yes, Father.

BALDWIN: It'll be a fine day tomorrow.

*(There is a pause.)*

JOHN: Dad.

BALDWIN: Yes?

JOHN: What did Gresham offer you?

BALDWIN *(simply)*: A hundred thousand dollars.

EVIE: What!

MARTHA: Robert!

BALDWIN: He put it aside for me without anybody knowing it. It's out of his private fortune, he says. It's not the depositors' money — as if that made any difference.

EVIE *(as if hypnotised)*: He offered you a hundred thousand dollars?

BALDWIN *(smiling at her amazement)*: I could have had it for the one word "Yes" — or even for nodding my head — or a look of the eyes.

JOHN: How — how do you know he meant it?

BALDWIN: His word is good.

JOHN: Even Now?

BALDWIN: He never lied to me, John. *[He pauses.]* I suppose my eyes must have shown something I didn't feel. He noticed it. He unlocked a drawer and *showed* me the hundred thousand.

JOHN: In cash?

BALDWIN: In thousand-dollar bills. They were genuine: I examined them.

EVIE *(slowly)*: And for that he wants you to say, "I don't remember."

BALDWIN (*smiling*): Just that: three words only.

JOHN: But you won't?

BALDWIN (*shaking his head*): Those three words would choke me if I tried to speak them. For some other man, perhaps, it would be easy. But for me? All of my past would rise up and strike me in the face. It would mean to the world that for years I had been living a lie: that I was not the honourable man I thought I was. When John Gresham offered me money, I was angry. But when I rejected it, and he showed no surprise, then I was pleased. It was a compliment, don't you think so?

JOHN (*slowly*): Rather an expensive compliment.

BALDWIN: Eh?

JOHN: A compliment which cost you a hundred thousand dollars.

BALDWIN: A compliment which was *worth* a hundred thousand dollars. I've never had that much money to spend in my life, John, but if I had I couldn't imagine a finer way to spend it.

JOHN (*slowly*): Yes, I suppose so.

MARTHA (*after a pause*): Will the depositors lose much, Robert?

BALDWIN (*emphatically*): The depositors will not lose a cent.

EVIE (*surprised*): But the papers said—

BALDWIN (*interrupting*): They had to print something; they guessed. I know. I tell you.

MARTHA: But you never said so before.

BALDWIN: I left that for Gresham. It will come out tomorrow.

JOHN: Why tomorrow? Why didn't you say so before? The papers asked you often enough.

BALDWIN: Nothing forced me to answer, John.

JOHN: That wasn't your real reason, was it, Dad? You knew the papers would keep right on calling you names [BALDWIN *does not answer*. JOHN's *face lights up with sudden understanding*.] You wanted to let Gresham announce it himself: because it will be something in his favour! Eh?

BALDWIN: Yes....We were able to save something from the wreck, Gresham and I. It was more than I had expected — almost twice as much — and with what Gresham has it will be enough.

EVIE: Even without the hundred thousand?

[BALDWIN *does not answer*.]

JOHN (*insistently*): Without the money that Gresham had put away for you?

BALDWIN: Yes. I didn't know there was the hundred thousand until today. Gresham didn't tell me. We reckoned without it.

EVIE: Oh!

JOHN: And you made both ends meet?

BALDWIN: Quite easily. (*He smiles.*) Mr. Marshall is running the reorganisation; Mr. Marshall of the Third National. He hasn't the least idea that it's going to turn out so well.

(*There is a pause.*)

JOHN: They're going to punish Gresham, aren't they?

BALDWIN: I'm afraid so.

JOHN: What for?

BALDWIN: Misappropriating the funds of the —

JOHN (*interrupting*): Oh, I know that. But what *crime* has he committed?

BALDWIN: That's a crime, John.

EVIE: But if nobody loses anything by it?

BALDWIN: It's a crime nevertheless.

JOHN: And they're going to *punish* him for it!

BALDWIN: They can't let him go, John. He's too conspicuous.

JOHN: Do you think that's right, Governor?

BALDWIN: *My* opinion doesn't matter, John.

JOHN: But what do you think?

BALDWIN: I think—I think that I'm sorry for John Gresham—terribly sorry.

JOHN (*slowly*): It's nothing but a technicality, Dad. Nobody loses a cent. It's rather hard on Gresham, I say.

BALDWIN (*after a pause*): Yes, John.

EVIE (*timidly*): Would it be such an awful thing, Father, if you let him off?

BALDWIN (*smiling*): I wish I could, Evie. But I'm not the judge.

EVIE: No, but...

BALDWIN: But what?

EVIE: You're the only witness against him.

BALDWIN (*nonplussed*): Evie!

JOHN: She's right, Governor.

BALDWIN: You, too, John?



JOHN: It's going to be a nasty mess if they put John Gresham in jail—with your own son named after him! It's going to be pleasant for me! John Gresham Baldwin!

MARTHA (*after a pause*): Robert, I'm not sure I understood what you said before. What did Mr. Gresham want you to do for him?

BALDWIN: Get him off tomorrow.

MARTHA: You could do that?

BALDWIN: Yes.

MARTHA: How?

BALDWIN: By answering "I don't remember" when they ask me dangerous questions.

MARTHA: Oh! And you *do* remember?

BALDWIN: Yes, nearly everything.

JOHN: No matter what they ask you?

BALDWIN: I can always refresh my memory. You see, I have notes.

JOHN: But without those notes you wouldn't remember?

BALDWIN: What do you mean, John?

JOHN (*without answering*): As a matter of fact, you will have to rely on your notes nearly altogether, won't you?

BALDWIN: Everybody else does the same thing.

JOHN: Then it won't be far from the truth if you say, "I don't remember."

MARTHA: I don't see that Mr. Gresham is asking so much of you.

BALDWIN: Martha!

MARTHA: Robert, I'm as honourable as you are —

BALDWIN: That goes without saying, Martha.

MARTHA: It doesn't seem right to me to send an old friend to jail. [*As he speaks she holds up her hand.*] Now don't interrupt me! I've been thinking. The day John was baptised, when Mr. Gresham stood sponsor for him: how proud we were! And when we came home from the church you said — do you remember what you said, Robert?

BALDWIN: No. What was it?

MARTHA: You said, "Martha, may our son always live up to the name which we have given him!" Do you remember that?

BALDWIN: Yes — dimly.

JOHN: Ha! Only *dimly*, Governor?

BALDWIN: What do you mean, John?

MARTHA (*giving JOHN no opportunity to answer*): It would be sad — very sad — if the name of John Gresham, our son's name, should come to grief through you, Robert.

BALDWIN (*after a pause*): Martha, are you telling me to accept the bribe money that John Gresham offered me?

EVIE: Why do you call it bribe money, Father?

BALDWIN (*bitterly*): Why indeed? Gresham had a prettier name for it. He said that he had underpaid me all these years. You know, I was getting only sixty dollars a week when the crash came —

JOHN (*impatently*): Yes, yes?

BALDWIN: He said a hundred thousand represented the difference between what he had paid me and what I had actually been worth to him.

MARTHA: That's no less than true, Robert. You've worked for him very faithfully.

BALDWIN: He said that if he had paid me what he should have, I would have put by more than a hundred thousand by now.

JOHN: That's so, isn't it, Dad?

BALDWIN: Who knows? I never asked him to raise my salary. When he raised it, it was of his own accord. [*There is a pause. He looks around.*] Well, what do you think of it, Evie?

EVIE (*hesitantly*): If you go on the stand tomorrow...

BALDWIN: Yes?

EVIE: And they put John Gresham in jail, what will people say?

BALDWIN: They will say I have done my duty. Evie: no more and no less.

EVIE: Will they?

BALDWIN: Why, what should they say?

EVIE: I don't think so, of course, but other people might say that you had turned traitor to your best friend.

BALDWIN: You don't mean that, Evie?

EVIE: When they find out that they haven't lost any money—when John Gresham tells them that he will pay back every cent—then they won't want him to go to jail. They'll feel sorry for him.

BALDWIN: Yes, I believe that. I hope so.

JOHN: And they won't feel too kindly disposed towards the man who helps put him in jail.

MARTHA: They'll say you went back on an old friend, Robert.

JOHN: When you pull out your notes in court, to be sure of sending him to jail—! *[He breaks off with a snort.]*

EVIE: And Mr. Gresham hasn't done anything really wrong.

JOHN: It's a technicality, that's what it is. Nobody loses a cent. Nobody wants to see him punished.

EVIE: Except you, Father.

JOHN: Yes. And you're willing to jail the man after whom you named your son!

MARTHA *(after a pause)*: I believe in being merciful, Robert.

BALDWIN: Merciful?

MARTHA: Mr. Gresham has always been very good to you.

*[There is another pause. Curiously enough, they do not seem to be able to meet each other's eyes.]*

MARTHA: Ah, well! What are you going to do now, Robert?

BALDWIN: What do you mean?

MARTHA: You have been out of work since the bank closed.

BALDWIN *(shrugging his shoulders)*: Oh, I'll find a position.

MARTHA *(shaking her head)*: at your age... ?

BALDWIN: It's the man that counts.

MARTHA: Yes. You said that a month ago.

JOHN: I heard from Donovan—

BALDWIN *(quickly)*: What did you hear?

JOHN: He's gone with the Third National, you know.

BALDWIN: Yes; he's helping with the reorganisation.

JOHN: They wouldn't take you on there—

BALDWIN: Their staff was full. They couldn't very well offer me a position as a clerk.

JOHN: That was what they told you.

BALDWIN: Wasn't it true?

JOHN *(shakes his head)*: Mr. Marshall said he wouldn't employ a man who was just as guilty as John Gresham.

BALDWIN: But I'm not!

JOHN: Who knows it?

BALDWIN: Everybody will tomorrow!

JOHN: Will they believe you? Or will they think you're trying to save your own skin?

BALDWIN: I found out only a day before the smash.

JOHN: Who will believe that?

BALDWIN: They will *have to*!

JOHN: How will you make them? I'm afraid you'll find that against you wherever you go, Governor. Your testifying against John Gresham won't make things any better. If you ever get another job, it will be with him! [*This is a startling idea to BALDWIN, who shows his surprise.*] If Gresham doesn't go to jail, he'll start in business again, won't he? And he can't offer you anything less than a partnership.

BALDWIN: A partnership?

JOHN (with meaning): With the hundred thousand capital you could put in the business, Dad.

BALDWIN: John!

JOHN: Of course, the capital doesn't matter. He'll owe you quite a debt of gratitude besides.

*(There is a pause.)*

MARTHA: A hundred thousand would mean a great deal to us, Robert. If you don't find a position soon, John will have to support us.

JOHN: On thirty dollars a week, Dad.

JOHN: That won't go very far.

MARTHA: It's not fair to John.

JOHN (*angrily*): Oh, don't bother about me.

*[EVIE begins to weep.]*

JOHN: Look here, Governor, you've said nothing to the papers. If you say nothing more tomorrow, what does it amount to but sticking to your friend? It's the square thing to do—he'd do as much for you.

BALDWIN (*looks appealingly from one face to another. They are averted. Then*): You — you want me to take this money? [*There is no answer.*] Say "Yes", one of you. [*Still no answer.*] Or "No". [*A long pause. Finally*] I couldn't go into partnership with Gresham.

MARTHA (*promptly*): Why not?

BALDWIN: People wouldn't trust him.

JOHN: Then you could go into business with someone else, Dad. A hundred thousand is a lot of money.

BALDWIN (*walks to the window. Looks out*): God knows I never thought this day would come! I know — I know no matter how you try to excuse it — I know that if I take this money I do a dishonourable thing. And you know it! You, and you, and you! All of you! Come, admit it!

JOHN (*resolutely*): Nobody'll ever hear of it.

BALDWIN: But amongst ourselves, John! Whatever we are to the world, let us be honest with each other, the four of us! Well? [*His glance travels from JOHN to EVIE, whose head is bowed; from her to his wife, who is apparently busy with her knitting. He raises MARTHA'S head; looks into her eyes. He shudders.*] Shams! Liars! Hypocrites! Thieves! And I no better than any of you! We have seen our souls naked, and they stink to Almighty Heaven! Well, why don't you answer me?

MARTHA (*feebly*): It's not wrong, Robert.

BALDWIN: It's not right.

JOHN (*facing him steadily*): A hundred thousand is a lot of money, Dad.

BALDWIN (*nodding slowly*): You can look into my eyes now, my son, can't you?

JOHN (*without moving*): Dad, why did you refuse? Wasn't it because you were afraid of what *we'd* say?

BALDWIN (*after a long pause*): Yes, John.

JOHN: Well, nobody will ever know it.

BALDWIN: Except the four of us.

JOHN: Yes — Father.

[*Abruptly they separate. EVIE weeps in silence. MARTHA being less emotional, blows her nose noisily, and fumbles with her knitting. JOHN having nothing better to do, scowls out of the window, and BALDWIN, near the fireplace, clenches and unclenches his hands.*]

JOHN: Someone's coming.

MARTHA (*raising her head*): Who is it?

JOHN: I can't see. (*With sudden apprehension.*) It looks like Marshall.

BALDWIN: Marshall?

[*The doorbell rings. They are motionless as a MAID enters at one side and goes out the other. The MAID re-enters.*]

THE MAID: A gentleman to see you, sir.

BALDWIN (*pulling himself together*): Who, me?

THE MAID: Yes, sir. (*She hands him a card on a salver.*)

BALDWIN: It is Marshall.

MARTHA: The President of the Third National?

BALDWIN: Yes. What does he want here?

THE MAID: Shall I show him in, sir?

BALDWIN: Yes, yes. By all means.

(*The MAID goes out.*)

MARTHA (*crossing to him quickly*): Robert! Be careful of what you say: you're to go on the stand tomorrow.

BALDWIN (*nervously*): Yes, yes. I'll look out.

(*The MAID re-enters, opening the door for MARSHALL.*)

MARSHALL (*coming into the room very buoyantly*): Well, well, spending the afternoon indoors? How are you, Mrs.

Baldwin? (*He shakes hands cordially.*) And you, Baldwin?

MARTHA: We were just going out. Come, Evie.

MARSHALL: Oh, you needn't go on my account. You can hear what I have to say. (*He turns to the head of the family.*)

Baldwin, if you feel like coming around to the Third National some time this week, you'll find a position waiting for you.

BALDWIN (*thunderstruck*): Do you mean that, Mr. Marshall?

MARSHALL (*smiling*): I wouldn't say it if I didn't. (*He continues more seriously.*) I was in to see Gresham this afternoon.

He told me about the offer he had made you. But he knew that no amount of money would make you do something you thought wrong. Baldwin, he paid you the supreme compliment: rather than go to trial with you to testify against him, he confessed.

BALDWIN (*sinking into a chair*): Confessed!

MARSHALL: Told the whole story. (*He turns to MARTHA.*) I can only say to you what every man will be saying tomorrow: how highly I honour and respect your husband! How sincerely —

MARTHA (*seizing his hand piteously*): Please! Please! Can't you see he's crying?

(Curtain)

PERCIVAL WILDE

**Glossary**

<b>no whit</b>	: not at all
<b>tense pause</b>	: interval of emotional tension
<b>indict</b>	: accuse (by a legal process)
<b>testify</b>	: give evidence in a court of law
<b>Mater</b> (slang)	: mother
<b>governor</b> (slang)	: father (also one's employer)
<b>the crash</b>	: financial ruin
<b>pegging along</b>	: continuing to work hard
<b>the stand</b>	: the witness-box
<b>have the whip hand</b>	: be in a position to control
<b>under a cloud</b>	: under a suspicion
<b>perjure</b>	: swear falsely
<b>Third National</b>	: Third National Bank supervising and controlling private banks.
<b>snort</b>	: sudden forcing of breath through the nose to express disapproval
<b>salver</b>	: tray
<b>buoyantly</b>	: in high spirits

**Comprehension**

1. Why was Mr. Gresham arrested?
2. What, according to Evie, did the papers say about Robert Baldwin?
3. Why didn't Baldwin explain his position to the papers?
4. What was Gresham's offer to Baldwin?
5. What was Gresham's reaction when Baldwin rejected his offer?
6. What was the first reaction of the members of Baldwin's family to his refusal to tell a lie?
7. What was the change in the attitude of the members of the family when they came to know the amount of the bribe?
8. What explanation did Gresham give for offering a large sum of money to Baldwin?
9. How did Baldwin react to the avarice of the members of his family?
10. How did he manage to be loyal to Mr. Gresham without sacrificing his principles?
11. How was Baldwin's honesty rewarded?

**Appreciation**

1. "Shams! Lars! Hypocrites! Thieves!" What provoked Baldwin to shout at his wife and children like this?
2. How did the members of the family react to Gresham's request that Baldwin should say, "I don't remember" in the court?
3. Why did he cry at the offer from 'Third National'?
4. Had Baldwin agreed to Gresham's request, what would have happened?

**For Discussion**

Affluence breeds all evils.

**Suggested Reading**

*Bishop's Candlesticks* by Norman McKinnel

*Waterloo* by Arthur Conan Doyle

*Riders to the Sea* by J.M. Synge





# **The Future is Now: A Zest for Living**

*Dr. Walter F. Stromer (1920–) served as a professor of speech communication at Cornell College. He was visually challenged. The following is an address he delivered at a conference for the parents of students at the Indiana School for the Blind. After reviewing how disabled people have been treated throughout history, Dr. Stromer noted that employment of the physically challenged is still a major problem. He also remarked that it should not be assumed that the physically challenged are unhappy. Given a little independence and a little faith, Stromer asserted, he had confidence that the physically challenged, in particular the visually challenged children of those present at this conference, could have successful careers and lead rewarding lives.*

WHEN I was told that the title of this talk was to be "The Future Is Now," I was puzzled. On second thought, I decided that this was a topic I could live with and that it expresses something which I truly believe. I feel strongly that we should learn from the past and that we have a responsibility to those

who come after us, but that the most important task for us is to live this day and this moment to the best of our ability.

Since many of you here are parents of blind children, I want to talk first about what has been done in the past for the blind<sup>1</sup> and other handicapped<sup>2</sup>. Then I want to make some tentative suggestions that may be of help to you in the future, which begins now.

Those wonderful Greeks of twenty-five hundred years ago, to whom we owe so much, used to put defective babies in clay jars beside the road and let them die. In Rome such children were put into wicker baskets and put out on the Tiber River, to be swept away and drowned somewhere downstream.

These earlier ancestors of ours were not entirely lacking in compassion; but, they were often in real danger of being exterminated by famine or flood or marauding enemies, and survival of the group had to be put ahead of the weakest members who could not help themselves. Caring for the handicapped, as we know it, could not really take place until societies became somewhat stable and had some surplus food and some leisure time for some members.

Lack of resources was not the only factor that kept society from humane treatment of its disabled members. Attitudes were also involved. Epilepsy was once thought to be caused by the moon. To be moonstruck was to be deranged or insane. What we call mental illness was once attributed to possession by demons. Blindness and other conditions were connected with sin, as when the disciples asked Christ, about the blind man, "who sinned, this man or his parents?" As long as the causes of disability are thought to be supernatural, either godly or satanic, the only cure will have to be supernatural, such as prayers, incantations or exorcisms; but, not much will get done at the local human level.

Slowly attitudes began to change. In the 4th century A.D., a Christian bishop urged compassion for the retarded. In the 9th century in Baghdad, the Caliph ordered that those getting out of hospitals should be given a sum of money to tide them over until they could go to work.

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1. The term blind is now referred to as visually challenged.  
 2. Now referred to as physically challenged.

We know that there are between 30 and 40 million disabled persons in this country and about 450 million in the world. Just the fact that we can count them, even approximately, is a mark of our progress. In the Middle Ages young children were not even counted in the census because it was assumed that most of them would die by the age of twelve. Why bother counting?

Another indication of concern and our openness to the subject is the fact that there are 120 organisations for the disabled. There are more than 130 wheelchair basketball teams. A totally deaf woman holds the world speed record for driving a vehicle on land. The President of Hofstra University is a man with cerebral palsy. Recently a young blind woman was involved in a down-hill skiing competition in Switzerland, while two other blind skiers and four sighted companions set out to ski across Lapland.

In the area of entertainment, we have had the play "Butterflies are Free", about a blind young man, and "Whose Life Is it, Anyway?" about a quadriplegic veteran. The movie "Inside Moves", deals with disabilities. The television movie, "Elephant Man," dealt with one who was grossly deformed. A retarded boy was permitted to play himself in a movie about the retarded instead of having the role played by a professional actor. From Seattle, you can rent a film about a boy who lost both legs and went on to become a football coach. In Dallas, a television station devotes several minutes each day to advertising 'available children'. These children are not for sale for immoral purposes but they are handicapped children available for adoption.

Yet with all this progress we must admit that there are still problems. Many of them are in the area of employment. Of those who are paralysed, almost 90 per cent are unemployed. Of the blind, 70 per cent are unemployed or underemployed. Harold Krents, a graduate of Harvard Law School, and inspiration for the movie and play, "Butterflies are Free", applied to forty law firms before he got a job.

Taking it all together, the good and the bad, I think it is not unreasonable to say that if one must live as a handicapped person, this time and this place is one of the best that history has known.

Next, I would like to talk especially to those of you who are parents of blind children about some tentative suggestions as to how you can help your child and yourself. I do this with some hesitation because I knew so much more about child rearing before we had children than I do now.

One of the first things you can do is to believe sincerely that raw fish tastes good. I use this example because we have a Japanese student who has stayed with us often who assures me that raw fish is delicious. My mind says it's true. My stomach says, don't touch it. It is hard for us really to believe that people can enjoy food which we consider repulsive. In the same way, it is hard for us to believe that others can be happy without all the things that make us happy. For example, people will look at one who is blind and say, "How terrible, how tragic, how miserable it must be without sight." Yet, I can assure you from my personal experience and from contact with many blind people, that blindness need not result in constant unhappiness. Keep in mind that we have no reliable external measures of happiness, no brain scan, no blood test. About the best we can do is to ask people if they are happy. While I may be better informed on the happiness of blind people than you, still when it comes to deaf-blindness, my own reaction is very similar to yours. I find myself thinking, "How tragic, how difficult." I read recently about a man and wife, both deaf-blind, taking training at the Helen Keller Centre on Long Island. When they want to communicate, one goes to the kitchen table and pounds on it to make the floor vibrate. Then they meet at the table and if they are angry they spell words into each others hands rapidly. My reaction was, "How tragic, how inadequate, how frustrating. How much better it would be if they could shout at each other, or better still if they could see each other and make faces." Or would it be better? Who are we to say that their way of communicating feelings or frustration is better or worse than ours? This same deaf-blind man laid tile for his basement floor; he hung paper on the walls of his kitchen, and he travels around the city by subway. Is he less happy than we are? I doubt it. Yes, he does miss out on things you and I take for granted. Is he aware of what he is missing? Yes, to some extent I am sure the deaf-blind are aware that life could be simpler and less

frustrating if they could see or hear, or both. But I doubt that they spent much time fretting about it. In general, it seems to be the nature of living organisms to adapt as best as they can to the circumstances that exist. Does the worm wish it could fly like the robin? Does the robin regret not having the wings of an eagle? But you will say people are different from the lower animals. Yes, they are. Yes, humans can worry and envy and regret. Still, it is amazing how people with stable personalities can have their bodies broken and pick up the few remaining pieces and make a life of them.

You and I can help handicapped people by letting them define happiness for themselves. We can make life more miserable for them if we constantly remind them of how terrible we feel because of what they are missing. When we do that we are really saying to them, "Please get rid of your handicap because it makes me so uncomfortable."

Let me illustrate how disabled people can be happy in their ignorance. Sometimes during a long Iowa winter I walk to class in the morning and decide it's a nice day because I can feel the sun warming my back. Then some sighted person comes along and says, "It's such a dull, depressing day." To him it is dull because the sun is under the clouds. That doesn't really destroy my happiness, and I do need to be aware that other people perceive the world in ways other than I do. I need to recognise that, just as I need to turn on lights in a room for the benefit of others even though I don't need them. So I will continue to be happy about the warm sun while my friend is depressed by the gray clouds. And, on other days, I will be depressed by the cold while he enjoys the bright, but cold, sunshine. We can each find happiness in our own way.

Is this so different from what happens to any of you? You are all missing out on some success or happiness. You fathers are all disabled in some ways. Some of you are too short to be successful basketball players, and others of you are too scrawny to be professional football players. Do you cry yourselves to sleep every night because of what you are missing? I doubt it. And, you mothers who are lacking the face or the figure to appear on a movie screen, do you beat your fists on the kitchen counter all day and moan about the things you can't do? I'm sure you go on with the business of

living and do the best you can. Allow handicapped persons to do the same. If they like raw fish, let them eat it.

My next suggestion for you as parents is that you be like the character in magazine ads for Hastings piston rings years ago. They showed a picture of a big muscle man with a scroungy beard with a friendly smile, and the caption was, "Tough, but oh so gentle". That is a good motto for parents—to be tough, but gentle. It is especially apt for the parents of handicapped children. Just being a parent, of any child, means that you have to be gentle and protective or the child will not survive the first few years of life. Yet, Somewhere along the way, you have to be as tough as the mother bear who cuffs the cubs on the snout to let them know that now is the time to leave home and get out on their own. It will be especially hard for you as parents of a blind child to watch your child bump into things or get cut and bruised and still to sit back calmly and say, "live and learn." But handicapped children, more than others, need to have such toughening experiences if they are to grow up as sturdy oaks instead of delicate African violets. All through life, society will tend to overprotect and shelter those who are disabled. They will need a little extra measure of toughness, of assertiveness, of independence if they are to get their fair share of rights and freedoms. It may help you in learning to be tough if you will remember that most of the accidents that happen to blind people are not serious, and almost never fatal. The greatest damage is always to the loved ones who watch things happen, and to the pride of the blind or disabled person.

Last winter I was hurrying to the chapel for a convocation programme. I took a short cut along a narrow sidewalk, got too far off to the left side, and got clipped just above my left eye by a tree branch stump where it had been cut off. The branch drew blood, and I knew it. I had no more than sat down in the chapel than one of my students came along and said, "Oh, you're hurt; are you all right?" I said, "Yes," and I wanted to tell him to go away and let me suffer in silence. After chapel, I did not want to go back to the office because I knew the secretary would notice and make a fuss. I didn't even want to go home for lunch because I thought my wife would wrap me in bandages and keep me in the house for a

month. What was hurt was my pride. I had demonstrated to others that I was careless, or worse, that blind people can't walk across the campus without bumping into things.

You can help most if you will encourage your child to be independent, to move out, to take risks. If there is a cut or a bruise, be cheerful about cleaning it up and applying a bandage and then go about your business. If you can do that, you will be saying most eloquently to your child, "I have confidence in you; keep trying."

My last suggestion to you is to believe in yourself. You are here at this conference to get help and reassurance from various experts. I am sure they have much to offer and I hope you will learn from them. Never forget that in one way you are more expert than any teacher, counsellor or psychiatrist you will ever meet. You are expert in knowing how it feels to have your life and your life blood wrapped up in a handicapped child, and to live with that investment twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year. That is very different from being a professional helper who deals with the problem for an hour a week, or an hour a day, or even six hours a day. We need professionals who can be detached and objective and sometimes we, as parents, need to learn some of that detachment of perspective. If ever the professional helpers get so detached that they forgot the depth of our feelings, please feel free to remind them that you, too, have some expertise. Some years ago, I came across a book by a French psychoanalyst, Alfred Adler. In the first chapter of his book he wrote, "When parents come to me with a problem about their child and they tell me what they have been doing, my first response is to say, 'I think you're on the right track,' because parents carry a heavy burden and they need all the support they can get." I wish I could meet that psychoanalyst and hug him and say, "Thank you for understanding."

I want you to learn all you can from the professionals here or wherever you are. I might even agree with them that you need to change your behaviour in some ways. I do not want you to feel that you are stupid and worthless and that you are not doing anything right. If you do that, you won't be a good role model for your child. I want your child to be happy, but part of that will come about if your child sees you as

parents who find life enjoyable and challenging. So — listen to the experts, but also trust yourself.

If I may summarise briefly, let me remind you how far we have come in a mere two thousands years, such a little time in the long history of the world. Next, believe in raw fish; that is, give handicapped people much freedom in deciding what they enjoy. Try to be both tough and gentle; and, finally, listen to others but also trust yourself. I think the greatest gift you can give your child is a zest for living, a spirit of wonder and adventure, and a confidence that the problems of life can be solved or endured.

In the words of a Chancellor, who was both a tyrant and a romantic, Otto von Bismarck, "With confidence in God, put on the spurs and let the wild horse of life fly with you over stones and hedges, prepared to break your neck, but always, without fear."

If that is a bit too romantic, let me suggest two lines from a Kipling poem. A Russian who spent seven years in Siberia said that these lines helped sustain him, "If you can fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds worth of distance run, yours is the world and all that's in it, and which is more, you'll be a man, my son."

WALTER F. STROMER

### Glossary

<b>wicker</b>	: twigs or canes woven together (typically of willow)
<b>exterminated</b>	: destroyed completely
<b>marauding</b>	: going about in search of plunder or prey
<b>epilepsy</b>	: a neurological disorder marked by sudden recurrent episodes of sensory disturbance, loss of consciousness or convulsions
<b>exorcisms</b>	: the expulsion or attempted expulsion of an evil spirit from a person or place
<b>quadriplegic</b>	: paralysis of both arms and both legs
<b>veteran</b>	: a person who has had long experience in a particular field



- African violets** : small East African plant with heart shaped velvety leaves and violet, pink or white flowers
- chapel** : a small building for Christian worship, typically one attached to an institution or private house
- zest** : great enthusiasm and energy

### Comprehension

1. Give a brief introduction about the author. Who was he addressing?
2. Why did the author eventually agree to give a talk?
3. What were the reasons that led our ancestors to behave in an inhuman manner towards the physically challenged?
4. What were the misconceptions generally associated with epilepsy and blindness in the ancient times?
5. Give examples from the text to show that the physically challenged have also achieved remarkably in various fields.
6. How has the media helped in spreading awareness about the capabilities of the challenged?
7. What is the greatest gift that the physically challenged children can be given?
8. What is the major problem that the physically challenged people face today?
9. The pride of a challenged person should not be hurt. Explain this suggestion of the author with an example.
10. What advice does the author give to the parents of the physically challenged?

### Appreciation

1. 'Being handicapped need not result in constant unhappiness'. Elucidate.
2. 'How terrible, how tragic, how miserable it must be without sight...' Is this reaction reasonable when you see a visually challenged person? If not, why?
3. How, according to the author, is happiness subjective? Substantiate your answer with examples from the text.
4. Justify the title, 'The Future is Now'.
5. What, according to Bismarck and Kipling, is the 'Zest for Living'?

**For Discussion**

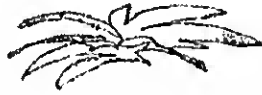
Handicaps invariably prevent one from leading a happy and productive life.

**Suggested Reading**

*A Man Who Had No Eyes* by McKinley Kantor

*The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller

*My Left Foot* by Christy Brown



# 8

## The Bet

*Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) was a well known Russian playwright and short-story writer. He began writing short stories during his days as a medical student at the University of Moscow. Some of his famous works are The Sea Gull, Uncle Vanya, The Three Sisters and The Cherry Orchard. His stories give a comprehensive and perceptive picture of life. In the present story Chekhov highlights the futility of a materialistic life and shows how knowledge can lead one towards spirituality.*

It was a dark autumn night. The old banker was pacing from corner to corner of his study, recalling to his mind the party he gave in the autumn fifteen years before. There were many clever people at the party and much interesting conversation. They talked among other things of capital punishment. The guests, among them not a few scholars and journalists, for the most part disapproved of capital punishment. They found it obsolete as a means of punishment unfitted to a Christian state and immoral. Some of them thought that capital punishment should be replaced universally by life imprisonment.

"I don't agree with you," said the host. "I myself have experienced neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment.

in my opinion capital punishment is more moral and more humane than imprisonment. Execution kills instantly, life imprisonment kills by degrees. Who is the more humane executioner. One who kills you in a few seconds or one who draws the life out of you incessantly, for years?"

"They're both equally immoral," remarked one of the guests, "because their purpose is the same, to take away life. The state is not God. It has no right to take away that which it cannot give back, if it should so desire."

Among the company was a young lawyer, a young man of twenty-five. On being asked his opinion, he said:

"Capital punishment and life imprisonment are equally immoral, but if I were offered the choice between them, I would certainly choose the second. It's better to live somehow than not to live at all."

There ensued a lively discussion. The banker, who was then younger and more nervous, suddenly lost his temper, banged his fist on the table, and turning to the young lawyer, cried out:

"It's a lie, I bet you two millions you wouldn't stick in a cell even for five years."

"If you mean it seriously," replied the lawyer, "Then I bet, I'll stay not five but fifteen."

"Fifteen! Done!" cried the banker. "Gentlemen, I stake two millions".

"Agreed. You stake two millions and I my freedom," said the lawyer.

So this wild, ridiculous bet came to pass. The banker, who at that time had too many millions to count, spoiled and capricious, was beside himself with rapture. During supper he said to the lawyer jokingly:

"Come to your senses, young man, before its too late. Two millions are nothing to me, but you stand to lose three or four of the best years of your life. I say three or four, because you'll never stick it out any longer. Don't forget either, you unhappy man, that voluntary is much heavier than enforced imprisonment. The idea that you have the right to free yourself at any moment will poison the whole of your life in the cell. I pity you."

And now the banker, pacing from corner to corner, recalled all this and asked himself:

Why did I make this bet? What's the good? The lawyer loses fifteen years of his life and I throw away two millions. Will it convince people that capital punishment is worse or better than imprisonment for life? No, no! All stuff and rubbish. On my part, it was the caprice of a well-fed man, on the lawyer's pure greed of gold.

He recollected further what happened after the evening party. It was decided that the lawyer must undergo his imprisonment under the strictest observation, in a garden wing of the banker's house. It was agreed that during the period he would be deprived of the right to cross the threshold, to see living people, to hear human voices, and to receive letters and newspapers. He was permitted to have a musical instrument, to read books, to write letters, to drink wine and smoke tobacco. By the agreement he could communicate, but only in silence, with the outside world through a little window specially constructed for this purpose. Everything necessary, books, music, wine, he could receive in any quantity by sending a note through the window. The agreement provided for all the minutest details, which made the confinement strictly solitary, and it obliged the lawyer to remain exactly fifteen years from twelve o'clock of November 14, 1870 to twelve o'clock of November 14, 1885. The least attempt on his part to violate the conditions, to escape if only for two minutes before the time, freed the banker from the obligation to pay him the two millions.

During the first year of imprisonment, the lawyer, as far as it was possible to judge from his short notes, suffered terribly from loneliness and boredom. From his wing, day and night, came the sound of the piano. He rejected wine and tobacco.

During the first year the lawyer was sent books of a light character, novels with a complicated love interest, stories of crime and fantasy comedies, and so on.

In the second year the piano was heard no longer and the lawyer asked only for classics. In the fifth year, music was heard again, and the prisoner asked for wine. Those who watched him said that during the whole of that year he was

only eating, drinking, and lying on his bed. He yawned often and talked angrily to himself. Books he did not read. Sometimes at nights he would sit down to write. He would write for a long time and tear it all up in the morning. More than once he was heard to weep.

In the second half of the sixth year, the prisoner began zealously to study languages, philosophy, and history. He fell on these subjects so hungrily that the banker hardly had time to get books enough for him. In the space of four years about six hundred volumes were bought at his request.

It was while that passion lasted that the banker received the following letter from the prisoner: "My dear jailer, I am writing these lines in six languages. Show them to experts. Let them read them. If they do not find one single mistake, I beg you to give orders to have a gun fired off in the garden. By the noise I shall know that my efforts have not been in vain. The gentuses of all ages and countries speak in different languages; but in them all burns the same flame. Oh! if you knew my heavenly happiness now that I can understand them." The prisoner's desire was fulfilled. Two shots were fired in the garden by the banker's order.

Later on, after the tenth year, the lawyer sat immovable before his table and read only the New Testament. The banker found it strange that a man who in four years had mastered six hundred erudite volumes should have spent nearly a year in reading one book, easy to understand and by no means thick. The New Testament was then replaced by the history of religions and theology.

During the last two years of his confinement the prisoner read an extraordinary amount, quite haphazard. Now he would apply himself to the natural sciences, then he would read Byron<sup>1</sup> or Shakespeare<sup>2</sup>. Notes used to come from him in which he asked to be sent at the same time a book on chemistry, a textbook of medicine, a novel, and some treatise on philosophy or theology. He read as though he were swimming in the sea among broken pieces of wreckage, and in his desire to save his life was eagerly grasping one piece after another.

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1. Lord George Gordon Byron (1788-1824) English romantic poet

2. William Shakespeare (1564-1616), English playwright and poet

The Banker recalled all this, and thought:

Tomorrow at twelve o'clock he receives his freedom. Under the agreement, I shall have to pay him two millions. If I pay, it's all over with me. I am ruined forever....

Fifteen years before, he had too many millions to count, but now he was afraid to ask himself which he had more of, money or debts. Gambling on the stock exchange, risky speculation, and the recklessness of which he could not rid himself even in old age had gradually brought his business to decay; and the fearless, self-confident, proud man of business had become an ordinary banker, trembling at every rise and fall in the market.

"That cursed bet," murmured the old man clutching his head in despair.... "Why didn't the man die? He's only forty years old. He will take away my last farthing, marry, enjoy life, gamble on the exchange, and I will look on like an envious beggar and hear the same words from him every day: 'I'm obliged to you for the happiness of my life, let me help you.' No, it's too much! The only escape from bankruptcy and disgrace is that the man should die."

The clock had just struck three. The banker was listening. In the house everyone was asleep, and one could hear only the frozen trees whining outside the windows. Trying to make no sound, he took out of his safe the key of the door which had not been opened for fifteen years, put on his overcoat, and went out of the house. The garden was dark and cold. It was raining. A damp, penetrating wind howled in the garden and gave the trees no rest.

Though he strained his eyes, the banker could see neither the ground, nor the white statues, nor the garden wing, nor the trees. Approaching the garden wing, he called the watchman twice. There was no answer. Evidently the watchman had taken shelter from the bad weather and was now asleep somewhere in the kitchen or the greenhouse.

If I have the courage to fulfil my intention, thought the old man, the suspicion will fall on the watchman first of all.

In the darkness he groped for the steps and the door and entered the hall of the garden wing, then poked his way into a narrow passage and struck a match. Not a soul was there. Someone's bed, with no bedclothes on it, stood there, and an

iron stove loomed dark in the corner. The seals on the door that led into the prisoner's room were unbroken.

When the match went out, the old man, trembling from agitation, peeped into the little window.

In the prisoner's room a candle was burning dimly. The prisoner himself sat by the table. Only his back, the hair on his head, and his hands were visible. Open books were strewn about on the table, on the two chairs, and on the carpet near the table.

Five minutes passed and the prisoner never once stirred. Fifteen years' confinement had taught him to sit motionless. The banker tapped on the window with his finger, but the prisoner made no movement in reply. Then the banker cautiously tore the seals from the door and put the key into the lock. The rusty lock gave a hoarse groan and the door creaked. The banker expected instantly to hear a cry of surprise and the sound of steps. Three minutes passed and it was as quiet inside as it had been before. He made up his mind to enter.

Before the table sat a man, unlike an ordinary human being. It was a skeleton, with tight-drawn skin, with long curly hair like a woman's, and a shaggy beard. The colour of his face was yellow, of an earthy shade; the cheeks were sunken, the back long and narrow, and the hand upon which he leaned his hairy head was so lean and skinny that it was painful to look upon. His hair was already silvering with gray, and no one who glanced at the senile emaciation of the face would have believed that he was only forty years old. On the table, before his bended head, lay a sheet of paper on which something was written in a tiny hand.

Poor devil, thought the banker, he's asleep and probably seeing millions in his dreams. I have only to take and throw this half-dead thing on the bed, smother him a moment with the pillow, and the most careful examination will find no trace of unnatural death. But, first, let me read what he has written here.

The banker took the sheet from the table and read:

"Tomorrow at twelve o'clock midnight I shall obtain my freedom and the right to mix with people. But before I leave this room and see the sun I think it necessary to say a few



words to you. On my own clear conscience and before God, who sees me, I declare to you that I despise freedom, life, health, and all that your books call the blessings of the world.



"For fifteen years I have diligently studied earthly life. True, I saw neither the earth nor the people, but in your books I drank fragrant wine, sang songs, hunted deer and wild boar in the forests, loved women.... And beautiful women, like clouds ethereal, created by the magic of your poets' genius, visited me by night and whispered to me wonderful tales, which made my head drunken.

"In your books I climbed the summits of Elbruz<sup>3</sup> and Mont Blanc<sup>4</sup> and saw from there how the sun rose in the morning, and in the evening suffused the sky, the ocean and the mountain ridges with a purple gold. I saw from there how

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3. Elbruz: Peaks of Elbrus located in central Caucasus range in Georgia and Russian Federation.

4. Highest peak in the Alps.

above me lightnings glimmered cleaving the clouds; I saw green forests, fields, rivers, lakes, cities. I heard sirens singing, and the playing of the pipes of Pan; I touched the wings of beautiful devils who came flying to me to speak of God.... In your books I east myself into bottomless abysses, worked miracles, burned cities to the ground, preached new religions, conquered whole countries....

"Your books gave me wisdom. All that the unwearying human thought created in the centuries is compressed to a little lump in my skull. I know that I am cleverer than you all.

"And I despise your books, despise all worldly blessings and wisdom. Everything is void, frail, visionary and delusive as a mirage. Though you be proud and wise and beautiful, yet will death wipe you from the face of the earth like the mice underground; and your posterity, your history, and the immortality of your men of genius will be as frozen slag, burnt down together with the terrestrial globe.

"You are mad, and have gone the wrong way. You take falsehood for truth and ugliness for beauty. You would marvel if suddenly apple and orange trees should bear frogs and lizards instead of fruit, and if roses should begin to breathe the odour of a sweating horse. So do I marvel at you, who have bartered heaven for earth. I do not want to understand you.

"That I may show you indeed my contempt for that by which you live, I waive the two millions of which I once dreamed as of paradise, and which I now despise. That I may deprive myself of my right to them, I shall come out from here five minutes before the stipulated term, and thus shall violate the agreement."

When he had read, the banker put the sheet on the table, kissed the head of the strange man, and began to weep. He went out of the wing. Never at any other time, not even after his terrible losses on the exchange, had he felt such contempt for himself as now. Coming home, he lay down on his bed, but agitation and tears kept him a long time from sleeping....

The next morning the poor watchmen came running to him and told him that they had seen the man who lived in the wing climb through window into the garden. He had gone

to the gate and disappeared. The banker instantly went with his servants to the wing and established the escape of his prisoner. To avoid unnecessary rumours he took the paper with the renunciations from the table and, on his return, locked it in his safe.

ANTON CHEKHOV

### Glossary

<b>capricious</b>	: impulsive, unpredictable
<b>rapture</b>	: feeling of intense pleasure and joy
<b>New Testament</b>	: the second part of the Bible, written originally in Greek, recording the life and teachings of Christ
<b>erudite</b>	: having great knowledge or learning
<b>farthing</b>	: coin of the UK (not in circulation now)
<b>whining</b>	: a long, high-pitched complaining cry
<b>senile</b>	: characteristic of old age: exhibiting a loss of mental faculties associated with old age
<b>emaciation</b>	: abnormally thin or weak
<b>abysses</b>	: bottomless depths
<b>Pan</b>	: a god of flocks and herds, typically represented with the horns, ears and legs of a goat on a man's body
<b>unwearying</b>	: never tiring or slackening
<b>mirage</b>	: something that appears real or possible but it is not so
<b>posterity</b>	: all future generations of people
<b>slag</b>	: stony waste matter separated from metals during the smelting or refining of ore
<b>terrestrial</b>	: of, or existing on the earth
<b>renunciation</b>	: formal rejection of something, typically a belief or course of action

### Comprehension

1. What was being discussed at the party hosted by the banker?
2. What was the opinion of the young lawyer present at the party?

3. What was the bet? And between whom was it made?
4. What were the terms and conditions of the bet?
5. How did the lawyer spend the first two years of his imprisonment?
6. What changes were observed in his behaviour in the fifth year?
7. When was the turning point in the lawyer's life and how did it come about?
8. What did he read during the tenth year and the last two years of his confinement?
9. What were the banker's fears when he realised that the lawyer was about to win the bet?
10. What did the banker think was the only escape from bankruptcy?
11. What did the banker notice when he entered the garden wing?
12. What was written in the note found on the lawyer's table?

### **Appreciation**

1. Why did the lawyer say he despised all wisdom and blessings of this world?
2. Why was the banker filled with self-contempt?
3. Who emerges as a better human being, the lawyer or the banker? Give reasons in support of your answer.
4. 'The geniuses of all ages and countries speak in different languages; but in them all burns the same flame'. Elucidate.

### **For Discussion**

Capital punishment is more humane than life imprisonment.

### **Suggested Reading**

*The Judgement of Paris* by Leonard Merrick

*The Verger* by W. Somerset Maugham

*A Spark Neglected Burns the House* by Leo Tolstoy

## Barin Bhowmik's Ailment

*Satyajit Ray (1921–1992), an Indian filmmaker and writer, is known for his humanistic approach to art and literature. Ray also edited Sandesh a children's magazine and wrote numerous fiction and non-fiction works. He was awarded the Bharat Ratna in 1992. His works display the intricacies of human relationships, emotions, struggles and conflicts. In the present story he depicts an encounter between two people who are trying to hide something from each other.*

MR. BARIN Bhowmik got into compartment D as instructed by the conductor and placed his suitcase under his seat. He would not need to open it during his journey. But he must keep the other smaller bag somewhere within easy reach. It contained such essentials as a comb, a hair brush, a toothbrush, his shaving kit, a book by James Hadley Chase to read on the way and several other knick-knacks, including throat pills. If the long train journey in a cold, air-conditioned compartment resulted in a sore throat, he would not be able to sing tomorrow. He quickly popped a pill into his mouth and put his bag on the small table before the window.

It was a Delhi-bound vestibule train. There were only about seven minutes left before its departure, and yet there was no sign of the other passengers. Would he be able to travel all the way to Delhi all alone? Could he indeed be so lucky? That would really be the height of luxury. The very idea brought a song to his lips.

He looked out of the window at the crowd on the platform. Two young men were glancing at him occasionally. Clearly, he had been recognised. This was not a new experience. People often recognised him for many were now familiar not just with his voice but also with his appearance. He had to give live performances at least half a dozen times every month. Listen to Barin Bhowmik tonight — he will sing songs written by Nazrul as well as *aadhunik*. Money and fame — both had come to Barin Bhowmik in full measure.

However, this had happened only over the last five years. Before that he had had to struggle a lot. It was not enough to be a talented singer. He needed a suitable break and proper backing. This came in 1963 when Bhola-da — Bhola Banerjee — invited him to sing in the Puja pandal in Unish Palli. Barin Bhowmik had not looked back since then.

In fact, he was now going to Delhi at the invitation of the Bengal Association to sing at their jubilee celebrations. They were paying for his travel by first class and had promised to make all arrangements for his stay in Delhi. He intended spending a couple of days in Delhi. Then he would go to Agra and Fatehpur Sikri and return to Calcutta<sup>1</sup> a week later. After that it would be time for Puja again and life would become madly hectic.

"Your order for lunch, sir...?"

The conductor-guard appeared in the doorway.

"What is available?"

"You are a non-vegetarian, aren't you? You could choose between Indian and Western food. If you want Indian, we've got...."

Barin placed his order for lunch and had just lit a Three Castles cigarette when another passenger came into his compartment; the same instant, the train began pulling out of the station.

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1. Now, Kolkata

Barin looked at the newcomer. Didn't he seem vaguely familiar? Barin tried to smile, but his smile vanished quickly as there was no response from the other. Had he made a mistake? Oh, God — how embarrassing! Why did he have to smile like an idiot? A similar thing had happened to him once before. He had thumped a man very hard on the back with a boisterous, "Hel-lo, Tridib-da! How are you?" only to discover he was not Tridib-da at all. The memory of this incident had caused him much discomfort for days afterward. God laid such a lot of traps to embarrass one!

Barin Bhowmik looked at the other man once more. He had kicked off his sandals and was sitting with his legs outstretched, leafing through the pages of the latest *Illustrated Weekly*. Again, Barin got the feeling that he had seen him somewhere, and not just for a few minutes. He had spent a long time in this man's company. But when was it? And where? The man had bushy eyebrows, a thin moustache, shiny hair and a little mole in the middle of his forehead. Yes, this face was certainly familiar. Could he have seen this man when he used to work for Central Telegraph? But surely the whole thing could not have been one-sided? His companion was definitely not showing any sign of recognition.

"Your order for lunch, sir?"

The conductor-guard had reappeared. He was a portly, rather amiable, gentleman.

"Well," said the newcomer, "we'll worry about lunch later. Could I have a cup of tea first?"

"Of course."

"All I need is a cup and the beverage. I prefer drinking black tea."

That did it. Barin Bhowmik suddenly began to feel rather unwell. There was a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. Then it seemed as though his heart had grown wings and flown straight into his lungs. It was not just the man's voice but also the words he uttered with a special emphasis: black tea. That was enough to remove the uncertainties from Barin's mind. Every memory came flooding back.

Barin had indeed seen this man before and that too — strangely enough — in a similar air-conditioned compartment of a train going to Delhi. He himself was going to Patna to

attend the wedding of his cousin, Shipra. Three days before he left, he had won a little more than seven thousand rupees at the races. He could, therefore, afford the luxury of travelling by first class. This happened nine years ago, in 1964, long before he had become a well-known singer. He could vaguely recall the other man's surname. It began with a 'C'. Chowdhury? Chakravarty? Chatterjee?

The conductor-guard left. Barin realised he could no longer sit facing the other man. He went and stood in the corridor outside, well away from his fellow passenger. Yes, coincidences did occur in life. But this one was unbelievable.

But had 'C' recognised him? If he had not, there might be two reasons for it. Perhaps he had a weak memory. Or perhaps Barin's appearance had undergone significant changes in these nine years. He stared out of the window and tried to recall, what these changes might possibly be.

He had gained a lot of weight, so presumably his face now looked fuller than it had before. He did not wear glasses in those days. Now he did. And his moustaches had gone. When did he shave them off? Ah, yes. Not very long ago. He had gone to a salon on Hajra Road. The barber was both young and inexperienced. He failed to get the symmetry right while trimming the moustaches. Barin himself did not notice it at first; but when everyone in his office from the chatty old liftman, Sukdeo, to the sixty-two-year-old cashier, Keshav Babu, began commenting on it, he shaved his precious moustaches off totally. This had happened about four years ago.

So he had lost the moustaches, but gained a bit of flesh on his cheeks and acquired a pair of glasses. Feeling a little reassured, he returned to his carriage.

A bearer came in with a pot of tea and placed it in front of C. Barin, too, felt the need for a drink, but did not dare speak to the bearer. What if C recognised his voice?

Barin did not want even to think about what C might do to him if he did get recognised. But, of course, everything depended on the kind of man C was. If he was anything like Animesh-da, Barin had nothing to fear. Once, in a bus, Animesh-da realised someone was trying to pick his pocket. But he was too shy to raise a hue-and-cry, so he



practically gave away his wallet to the pickpocket, together with four crisp ten-rupee notes. He told his family afterwards, "A big scene in a crowded bus with me playing a prominent role in it — no, I could not allow that to happen."

Was this man a bit like that? Probably not. People like Animesh-da were hard to come by. Besides, his looks were not very reassuring. Everything about him — those bushy eyebrows, the blunt nose and that chin that jutted out — seemed to suggest that he would not hesitate at all to plant his hairy hands on Barin's throat and say, "Are you not the same man who stole my clock in 1964? Scoundrel! I have spent these nine years looking for you! Today, I shall..."

Barin dared not think any more. Even in this air-conditioned compartment there were beads of perspiration on his forehead. He stretched himself out on his berth and covered his eyes with his left arm. It was one's eyes that gave one away. In fact, C had seemed familiar only because Barin recognised the look in his eyes.

He could now recall every incident vividly. It was not just the matter of stealing C's clock. He could remember every little thing he had stolen in his life ever since his boyhood. Some were totally insignificant things like a ballpoint pen (Mukul Mama's), or a cheap magnifying glass (his classmate, Akshay's), or a pair of bone cuff-links that belonged to Chheni-da and which Barin did not need at all. He never wore them even once. The only reason he stole these and for that matter, all those other things — was that they were near at hand and they belonged to someone else.

Between the ages of twelve and twenty-five, Barin Bhowmik had removed at least fifty different things from various people and made a collection in his house. What could one call it but stealing? The only difference between him and a regular thief was that a thief stole to survive in life; Barin did it out of habit. Nobody ever suspected him. He had, therefore, never been caught. Barin knew that this habit, this strange compulsion to steal things, was a kind of illness. Once he had even learnt the medical term for it from one of his friends who was a doctor, but now he could not remember what it was.

But C's clock was the last thing he had stolen. In the last nine years, he had never experienced that sudden, strong urge. He knew he had got over his illness and was now totally cured.

The difference between stealing C's clock and all the other petty thefts he had indulged in was that he had really wanted that clock. It was a beautiful travelling clock, made in Switzerland. It lay in a blue square box and stood upright the moment the lid was lifted. It was an alarm clock and the sound of the alarm was so sweet that it was a pleasure to wake up to it.

Barin had used that clock consistently over these nine years. He took it with him wherever he went. Even today, the clock was resting within the depths of the bag kept on the table.

"How far are you going?"

Barin gave a violent start. The other man was actually speaking to him!

"Delhi."

"Pardon?"

"Delhi."

The first time, in an effort to disguise his voice, Barin had spoken so softly that the man had clearly not heard him.

"Do you find it a bit too cold in here? Is that what's affecting your voice?"

"N-n-no."

"It can happen, of course. Actually, I would have preferred going by ordinary first class if it wasn't for the dust."

Barin did not utter a word. He did not want to look at C, but his own curiosity forced him to cast frequent glances in C's direction. Was C showing signs of recognition? No. He appeared quite relaxed. Could he be pretending? But there was no way of being sure. After all, Barin did not know him well. All he had learnt the last time about his fellow passenger was that he liked having black tea and that he was wont to get down at every station to buy snacks. Thanks to this habit, Barin had had the chance to eat a lot of tasty stuff.

Apart from this, Barin had seen one other side to C's character, just as they were about to reach Patna. This was directly related to the incident involving the clock.

They had been travelling by the Amritsar Mail. It was supposed to reach Patna at 5 a.m. The conductor came and woke Barin at 4.30. C, too, was half awake, although he was going up to Delhi.

Just about three minutes before the train was to reach Patna, it suddenly screeched to a halt. What could be the reason? There were a few people with torches running about on tracks. Was it anything serious? In the end, the guard turned up and said that an old man had been run over by the engine while crossing the track. The train would start as soon as his body was removed.

C got very excited at this news and clambered down quickly in the dark, still clad in his sleeping suit. Then he went out to see for himself what had happened.

It was during this brief absence that Barin had removed the clock from C's bag. He had seen C wind it the night before, and had felt tempted immediately. But since the chances of finding a suitable opportunity were dim, he had told himself to forget the whole thing. But, when an opportunity presented itself so unexpectedly, Barin simply could not stop himself. Even at the risk of being seen by the other passenger lying on the upper berth, he had slipped his hand into C's bag and had taken the clock out. Then he had dropped it into his own case. It took him between fifteen and twenty seconds to do this. C had returned about five minutes later.

"A horrible business! A beggar, you see. The head's been totally severed from the body. I fail to see how an engine can possibly hit somebody despite a cow-catcher. Isn't it supposed to push aside all obstacles on the track?"

Barin got off safely at Patna and was met by his uncle. The faint uneasiness in the pit of his stomach vanished the instant he got into his uncle's car and drove off. His heart told him that that was the end of the story. No one could catch him now. The chances of running into C were one in a million; or perhaps even less than that.

But who knew that one day, years later, by such an incredible coincidence, they would meet again? "A thing like this is enough to make one turn superstitious," thought Barin to himself.

"Do you live in Delhi? Or Calcutta?" asked C.

He had asked him a lot of questions the last time as well, Barin recalled. He hated people who tried to act friendly.

"Calcutta," said Barin. Oh no! He had spoken in his normal voice. He really must be more careful.

Good God — why was the man staring so hard at him? What could be the reason for such interest? Barin's pulse began beating faster again.

"Did your photograph come out in the papers recently?"

Barin realised it would be foolish not to tell the truth. There were other Bengali passengers on the train who might recognise him. There was no harm in telling this man who he was. In fact, if he could be told that Barin was a famous singer, he might find it difficult to relate him to the thief who had once stolen his clock.

"Where did you see this photograph?" Barin threw a counter question.

"Do you sing?" came another one.

"Yes, a little."

"Your name...?"

"Barindranath Bhowmik,"

"Ah! I see. Barin Bhowmik. That's why you seemed familiar."

"You sing on the radio, don't you?"

"Yes."

"My wife is an admirer of yours. Are you going to Delhi to sing at some function?"

"Yes."

Barin was not going to tell him much. If a simple "yes" or "no" could suffice, there was no need to say anything else.

"I know a Bhowmik in Delhi. He's in the Finance Ministry, Nitish Bhowmik. Is he a relative or something?"

Indeed. Nitish was Barin's first cousin. A man well known for his rigid discipline. A close relative, but not one close to Barin personally.

"No, I'm afraid I don't know him."

Barin decided to tell this one lie. He wished the man would stop talking. Why did he want to know so many things?

Oh good. Lunch had arrived. Hopefully, the volley of questions would cease, at least for a little while.

And so it did. C was obviously one who enjoyed eating. He began to concentrate on his food and fell silent. Barin no

longer felt all that nervous, but still he could not relax completely. They would have to spend at least another twenty hours in each other's company, Memory was such a strange phenomenon. Who could tell what little thing — a gesture, a look, a word — might make some old and forgotten memory come to life?

Black tea, for instance. Barin believed that if those two words had not been uttered, he would never have recognised C. What if something he said or something he did made C recognise *him*?

The best thing, of course, would be not to say or do anything at all. Barin lay down on his berth, hiding his face behind his paperback. When he finished the first chapter, he turned his head cautiously and stole a glance at C. He seem to be asleep. The *Illustrated Weekly* had dropped from his hand onto the floor. An arm was flung across his eyes, but from the way his chest rose and fell it seemed as though he had fallen into a deep sleep. Barin looked out of the window. Open fields, trees, little huts — the barren landscape of Bihar flashed past. The noise of the wheels came very faintly through the double glass of the windows, sounding as though, in the far distance, a number of drums were being beaten in the same steady rhythm: *dha-dhinak, na-dhinak, dha-dhinak, na-dhinak...*

Another sound from within was soon added to this: the sound of C's snoring.

Barin felt a lot more reassured. He began humming a Nazrul song. His voice did not sound too bad. He cleared his throat once and began to sing a bit more loudly. But he had to stop almost immediately.

Something else was making a noise in the compartment. It shocked Barin into silence.

It was the sound of an alarm clock. The alarm on the Swiss clock kept in his bag had somehow been set off. And it continued to ring, non-stop.

Barin discovered he could not move his limbs. They were paralysed with fear. His eyes fixed themselves on C.

C moved his arm. Barin stiffened.

C was now awake. He removed his arm from his eyes.

"Is it that glass? Could you please remove it? It's vibrating against the wall."

The noise stopped the instant Barin took the glass out of the iron ring attached to the wall. Before placing it on the table, he drank the water that was in it. This helped his throat, but he was still in no mood to start singing again.

Tea was served a little before they reached Hazaribagh Road. Two cups of hot tea and the absence of any further curious questions from C helped him relax more. He looked out once again and began humming softly. Soon, he was able to forget totally the danger he was in.

At Gaya, not unexpectedly, C got down on the platform and returned with two packets of peanuts. He gave one of them to Barin. Barin consumed the whole packet with considerable relish.

The sun had set by the time they left the station. C switched the lights on and said, "Are we running late? What's the time on your watch?"

Barin realised for the first time that C was not wearing a watch. This surprised him and he could not help but show it. Then he remembered that C's question had not been answered. He glanced at his wristwatch. "It's 7.35," he said.

"Then we're running more or less on time."

"Yes."

"My watch broke this morning. It was an HMT... gave excellent time... but this morning someone pulled my bedsheet so hard that the watch fell on the ground and...."

Barin did not comment. Any mention of watches and clocks was reprehensible.

"What make is your watch?" asked C.

"HMT."

"Does it keep good time?"

"Yes."

"Actually, I have always been unlucky in the matter of clocks."

Barin tried to yawn, simply to assume an unconcerned air, but failed in his attempt. Even the muscles in his jaw appeared to be paralysed. He could not open his mouth. But his ears continued to function. He was forced to hear all that C had to say.

"I once had a Swiss travelling clock, you see. Made of gold. A friend of mine had brought it from Geneva. I had used

it for barely a month and was carrying it with me on a train to Delhi — exactly like this, you know, in an air-conditioned compartment like this. There were only two of us — another Bengali chap. Do you know what he did? Just think of his daring! In my absence — while I may have gone to the bathroom or something — he nicked that clock from me! He looked such a complete gentleman. But I suppose I'm lucky he didn't murder me in my sleep. I stopped travelling by train after that. This time, too, I would have gone by air, but the pilots' strike upset my plans...."

Barin Bhowmik's throat was dry, his hands felt numb. But he knew if he said absolutely nothing after a tale like that, it would seem odd. In fact, it would seem distinctly suspicious. With a tremendous effort, he forced himself to speak.

"Did... did you not look for it?"

"Ha! Can any stolen object be found simply by looking for it? But, for a long time, I could not forget what the man looked like. Even now I have a vague recollection. He was neither fair nor dark, had a moustache and must have been about the same height as you, but was slimmer. If I could meet him again, I would teach him a lesson he'd remember all his life. I was a boxer once, you know. A light heavyweight champion. That man is lucky our paths never crossed again...."

Barin could now remember the full name of his companion. Chakravarty. Pulak Chakravarty. Strange! The minute he mentioned boxing, his name flashed in Barin's mind like a title on a television screen. Pulak Chakravarty had talked a lot about boxing the last time.

But even if his name had come back to him, what good did it do? After all, it was Barin who was the culprit. And now it had become impossible to carry his load of guilt. What if he went and confessed everything? And then returned the clock? There it was in that bag... so near at hand...!

No! Was he going mad? How could he entertain such thoughts? He was a famous vocalist. How could he admit to having stooped so low? Would his reputation not suffer? Would anyone ever invite him to sing at their function? What would his fans think? Where was the guarantee that this other

man was not a journalist or someone connected with the media? No, there was no question of making a confession.

Perhaps there was no need for it, either. Perhaps he would be recognised, anyway. Pulak Chakravarty was giving him rather odd looks. Delhi was still sixteen hours away. There was every chance of being caught. In Barin's mind flashed a sudden image — his moustaches had grown back, the flesh on his face had worn away, his glasses had vanished. Pulak Chakravarty was staring hard at the face he had seen nine years ago. The look of amazement in his slightly hazel eyes was slowly turning into a look filled with anger. His lips were parting in a slow, cruel smile. "Ah ha!" he seemed to be saying, "you *are* the same man, are you not? Good. I have waited all these years to lay my hands on you. Now I shall have my little revenge...."

By 10 p.m., Barin had acquired a fairly high temperature, accompanied by intense shivering. He called the guard and asked for an extra blanket. Then he covered himself from head to foot with both blankets and lay flat on his back. Pulak Chakravarty closed the door of their compartment and bolted it. Before switching off the lights, he turned towards Barin and said, "You appear unwell. I have some very effective pills with me — here, take these two. You're not used to travelling in an air-conditioned coach, are you?"

Barin swallowed the tablets. Well, given his present condition, Chakravarty might spare him a ruthless punishment. But Barin had made up his mind about one thing. He must transfer that clock to the suitcase of its rightful owner. He must try to get this done tonight, if possible. But he could not move until his temperature went down. His body was still shivering occasionally.

Pulak had switched on the reading lamp over his head. He had a paperback open in his hand. But was he reading it, or was he only staring at a page and thinking of something else? Why did he not turn the page? How long could it take to read a couple of pages?

Suddenly Barin noticed Pulak's eyes were no longer fixed on the book. He had turned his head slightly and was looking at Barin. Barin closed his eyes. After a long time, he opened one of them cautiously and glanced at Chakravarty. Yes, he



was still staring hard at Barin. Barin promptly shut his again. His heart was jumping like a frog, matching the rhythm of the wheels — *lub dup, lub dup, lub dup*.

A faint click told him that the reading light had been switched off. Slightly reassured, he opened both his eyes this time. The light in the corridor outside was coming in through a crack in the door. Barin saw Pulak Chakravarty put his book down on the table beside Barin's bag. Then he pulled his blanket up to his chin, turned on his side, facing Barin, and yawned noisily.

Barin's heartbeats gradually returned to normal. Tomorrow — yes, tomorrow morning he must return the clock. He had noticed Pulak's suitcase was unlocked. He had gone and changed into a sleeping suit only a little while ago.

Barin had stopped shivering. Perhaps those tablets had started to work. What *were* they? He had swallowed them simply so that he would recover in time to be able to sing at that function in Delhi. Applause from an audience was something he had no wish to miss. But had he done a wise thing? What if those pills...?

No, he must not think about such things. The incident of the glass vibrating against the wall was bad enough. Obviously, all these strange ideas were simply a result of a sick and guilt-ridden mind. Tomorrow, he must find a remedy for this. Without a clear conscience, he could not have a clear voice and his performance would be a total failure. Bengal Association....

The tinkle of tea cups woke Barin in the morning. A waiter had come in with his breakfast — bread, butter, an omelette and tea. Should he be eating all this? Did he still have a slight fever? No, he did not. In fact, he felt just fine. What wonderful tablets those were! He began to feel quite grateful towards Pulak Chakravarty.

But where was he? In the bathroom, perhaps. Or was he in the corridor? Barin went out to take a look as soon as the waiter had gone. There was no one in the corridor outside. How long ago had Pulak left? Should he take a chance?

Barin took a chance, but did not quite succeed in his effort. He had taken the clock out of his own bag and had just bent down to pull out Pulak's suitcase from under his

berth, when his fellow passenger walked in with a towel and a shaving kit in his hands. Barin's right hand closed around the clock. He straightened himself.

"How are you? All right?"

"Yes, thank you. Er... can you recognise this?"



Barin opened his palm. The clock lay on it. A strange determination had risen in Barin's mind. He had got over the old compulsive urge to steal a long time ago. But this business of playing hide-and-seek, was this not a form of deception? All that tension, those uncertainties, the anxiety over should-I-do-it-or-shouldn't-I, this funny, empty feeling in his stomach, the parched throat, the jumping heart — all these were signs of a malady, were they not? This, too, had to be overcome. There could never be any peace of mind otherwise.

Pulak Chakravarty had only just started to rub his ears with his towel. The sight of the clock turned him into a statue. His hand holding the towel remained stuck to his ear.

Barin said, "Yes, I am that same man, I've put on a bit of weight, shaved my moustaches and have started wearing

glasses. I was then going to Patna and you to Delhi. In 1964. Remember that man who got run over by our train? And you went out to investigate? Well, I took your clock in your absence."

Pulak's eyes were now looking straight into Barin's. Barin saw him frowning deeply, the whites of his eyes had become rather prominent, his lips had parted as though he wanted to say something but could not find speech.

Barin continued, "Actually, it was an illness I used to suffer from. I mean, I am not really a thief. There is a medical term for it which escapes me for the moment. Anyway, I am cured now and am quite normal. I used your clock all these years and was taking it with me to Delhi. Since I happened to meet you -- it's really a miracle, isn't it? -- I thought I'd return it to you. I hope you will not hold any... er... against me."

Pulak Chakravarty could do no more than say "thanks" very faintly. He was still staring at the clock, now transferred to his own hand, totally dumbfounded.

Barin collected his toothbrush, toothpaste, and shaving kit. Then he took the towel off its rack and went into the bathroom. He broke into song as soon as he had closed the door, and was pleased to note that the old, natural melody in his voice was fully restored.

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It took him about three minutes to get N.C. Bhowmik in the Finance Ministry in Delhi. Then, a deep, familiar voice boomed into his ear.

"Hello."

"Niiish-da? This is Barin."

"Oh, so you've arrived, have you? I'm coming this evening to hear you sing. Even you have turned into a celebrity, haven't you? My, my, who would have thought it possible? But anyway, what made you ring me?"

"Well -- do you happen to know someone called Pulak Chakravarty? He is supposed to have been your batch-mate in college. He knew boxing."

"Who? Old Pincho?"

"Pincho?"

"Yes, he used to pinch practically everything he saw. Fountain pens, books from the library, tennis racquets from

our common room. It was he who stole my first Ronson. It was funny, because it wasn't as though he lacked anything in life. His father was a rich man. It was actually a kind of ailment."

"Ailment?"

"Yes, haven't you ever heard of it? It's called kleptomania. K-l-e-p...."

Barin put the receiver down and stared at his open suitcase. He had only just checked into his hotel and started to unpack. No, there was no mistake. A few items were certainly missing from it. A whole carton of Three Castles cigarettes, a pair of Japanese binoculars and a wallet containing five hundred-rupee notes.

Kleptomania. Barin had forgotten the word. Now it would stay etched in his mind — forever.

SATYAJIT RAY

### Glossary

<b>vestibule</b>	: an enclosed space which joins two railway coaches
<b>leafing</b>	: turning over the pages
<b>portly</b>	: stout; round and fat
<b>beverage</b>	: a drink other than water
<b>wont</b>	: accustomed; in the habit of doing something
<b>cowcatcher</b>	: metal frame at the front of a locomotive for pushing aside cattle or other obstacles on the line.
<b>volley</b>	: a series of utterances directed at someone in quick succession
<b>hazel</b>	: light-brown
<b>kleptomania</b>	: a recurrent urge to steal, typically without regard for need or profit
<b>etched</b>	: carved, cause to stand out or be clearly defined

### Comprehension

1. Why was Barin going to Delhi? Why did he consider himself 'lucky' when he entered the compartment?
2. Do you think Barin was conscious of his public image? Give examples from the text.

3. Why did Barin say, 'God laid such a lot of traps to embarrass one'?
4. Which statement revealed the second passenger's identity and what effect did it have on Barin?
5. Why did Barin pick up things and at what age did he start this?
6. Why did Barin speak so softly and what was the reaction of the other man?
7. What, according to Barin, was 'an incredible coincidence'?
8. Why did Barin think that C would not be able to recognise him?
9. Mention two occasions when Barin found himself on the verge of being caught.
10. How did Barin remember C's name and then why did he feel uncomfortable?
11. After recognising C, what was Barin afraid of?
12. How did Barin come to know that C was also suffering from the same ailment as he was?

### Appreciation

1. Though C and Barin suffer from the same malady, yet they are different, how? Give examples.
2. Barin is not only cured of his illness but has also gained confidence in himself. Draw a character sketch of Barin.
3. Bring out the element of surprise in the story.
4. Do you think C had recognised Barin right from the beginning? Give reasons in support of your answer.

### For Discussion

Honesty redeems any flaw in a person's character.

### Suggested Reading

*The Questionable Cargo* by Captain W. E. Johns

*An Astrologer's Day* by R.K. Narayan

*Dusk* by 'Saki'

# 10

## On Conduct in Company

*Philip Dormer Stanhope (1694-1773) was a famous orator and writer. In 1726, he succeeded to the title of his father as Lord Chesterfield. He is remembered chiefly by his Letters to his son and other relatives. In this letter Chesterfield expounds on the golden rules of conduct which have universal value.*

Bath, October 19, O.S. 1748.

Dear Boy,

Having, in my last, pointed out what sort of company you should keep, I will now give you some rules for your conduct in it; rules which my own experience and observation enable me to lay down and communicate to you with some degree of confidence. I have often given you hints of this kind before, but then it has been by snatches; I will now be more regular and methodical. I shall say nothing with regard to your bodily carriage and address, but leave them to the care of your dancing-master, and to your own attention to the best models; remember, however, that they are of consequence.

Talk often, but never long; in that case, if you do not please, at least you are sure not to tire your hearers. Pay

your own reckoning, but do not treat the whole company; this being one of the very few cases in which people do not care to be treated, every one being fully convinced that he has wherewithal to pay.

Tell stories very seldom, and absolutely never but where they are very apt, and very short. Omit every circumstance that is not material, and beware of digressions. To have frequent recourse to narrative betrays great want of imagination.

Never hold anybody by the button, or the hand, in order to be heard out; for, if people are not willing to hear you, you had much better hold your tongue than them.

Most long talkers single out some one unfortunate man in company (commonly him whom they observe to be the most silent, or their next neighbour) to whisper, or at least, in a half voice, to convey a continuity of words to. This is excessively ill-bred, and, in some degree, a fraud; conversation-stock being a joint and common property. But, on the other hand, if one of these unmerciful talkers lays hold of you, hear him with patience, and at least seeming attention, if he is worth obliging; for nothing will oblige him more than a patient hearing, as nothing would hurt him more than either to leave him in the midst of his discourse, or to discover your impatience under your affliction.

Take, rather than give, the tone of the company you are in. If you have parts, you will show them, more or less, upon every subject; and, if you have not, you had better talk sillily upon a subject of other people's than of your own choosing.

Avoid as much as you can, in mixed companies, argumentative polemical conversations; which, though they should not, yet certainly do, indispose, for a time, the contending parties towards each other; and, if the controversy grows warm and noisy, endeavour to put an end to it by some genteel levity or joke.

Above all things, and upon all occasions, avoid speaking of yourself, if it be possible. Such is the natural pride and vanity of our hearts, that it perpetually breaks out, even in people of the best parts, in all the various modes and figures of the egotism.

Some abruptly speak advantageously of themselves, without either pretence or provocation. They are impudent.

Others proceed more artfully, as they imagine, and forge accusations against themselves, complain of calumnies which they never heard, in order to justify themselves, by exhibiting a catalogue of their many virtues. "They acknowledge it may, indeed, seem odd, that they should talk in that manner of themselves; it is what they do not like, and what they never would have done; no, no torture should ever have forced it from them, if they had not been thus unjustly and monstrously accused. But, in these cases, justice is surely due to one's self, as well as to others; and, when our character is attacked, we may say, in our own justification, what otherwise we never would have said." This thin veil of modesty drawn before vanity is much too transparent to conceal it, even from very moderate discernment.

Others go more modestly and more slyly still (as they think) to work; but, in my mind, still more ridiculously. They confess themselves (not without some degree of shame and confusion) into all the cardinal virtues; by first degrading them into weaknesses, and then owning their misfortune, in being made up of those weaknesses. "They cannot see people suffer, without sympathising with, and endeavouring to help them. They cannot see people want, without relieving them; though, truly, their own circumstances cannot very well afford it. They cannot help speaking truth, though they know all the imprudence of it. In short, they know that, with all these weaknesses, they are not fit to live in the world, much less to thrive in it. But they are now too old to change, and must rub on as well as they can." This sounds too ridiculous and *outré*, almost for the stage; and yet, take my word for it, you will frequently meet with it upon the common stage of the world. And here I will observe, by the bye, that you will often meet with characters in nature so extravagant, that a discreet poet would not venture to set them upon the stage in their true and high colouring.

This principle of vanity and pride is so strong in human nature, that it descends even to the lowest objects; and one often sees people angling for praise, where, admitting all they say to be true (which by the way, it seldom is), no just praise is to be caught. One man affirms that he has ridden



post a hundred miles in six hours: probably it is a lie; but supposing it to be true, what then? Why, he is a very good post-boy, that is all. Another asserts, and probably not without oaths, that he drank six or eight bottles of wine at a sitting; out of charity, I will believe him a liar; for, if I do not, I must think him a beast.

Such, and a thousand more, are the follies and extravagancies, which vanity draws people into, and which always defeat their own purpose.

The only sure way of avoiding these evils is never to speak of yourself at all. But when historically you are obliged to mention yourself, take care not to drop one single word, that can directly or indirectly be construed as fishing for applause. Be your character what it will, it will be known; and nobody will take it upon your own word. Never imagine that anything you can say yourself will varnish your defects, or add lustre to your perfections; but, on the contrary, it may, and nine times in ten will, make the former more glaring, and the latter obscure. If you are silent upon your own subject, neither envy, indignation, nor ridicule will obstruct or allay the applause which you may really deserve; but if you publish your own panegyric, upon any occasion, or in any shape whatsoever, and however artfully dressed or disguised, they will all conspire against you, and you will be disappointed of the very end you aim at.

Take care never to seem dark and mysterious; which is not only a very unamiable character, but a very suspicious one too; if you seem mysterious with others, they will be really so with you, and you will know nothing. The height of abilities is to have a frank, open and ingenuous exterior, with a prudent and reserved interior; to be upon your own guard, and yet, by a seeming natural openness, to put people off theirs. Depend upon it, nine in ten of every company you are in will avail themselves of every indiscreet and unguarded expression of yours, if they can turn it to their own advantage. A prudent reserve is therefore as necessary as a seeming openness is prudent. Always look people in the face when you speak to them; the not doing it is thought to imply conscious guilt; besides that, you lose the advantage of observing by their countenances what impression your

discourse makes upon them. In order to know people's real sentiments, I trust much more to my eyes than to my ears; for they can say whatever they have in mind I should hear; but they can seldom help looking what they have no intention that I should know.

Neither retail nor receive scandal willingly; for though the defamation of others may for the present gratify the malignity of the pride of our hearts, cool reflection will draw very disadvantageous conclusions from such a disposition; and in the case of scandal, as in that of robbery, the receiver is always thought as bad as the thief.

Mimicry, which is the common and favourite amusement of little low minds, is in the utmost contempt with great ones. It is the lowest and most illiberal of all buffoonery. Pray, neither practise it yourself, nor applaud it in others. Besides that, the person mimicked is insulted; and, as I have often observed to you before, an insult is never forgiven.

I need not, I believe, advise you to adapt your conversation to the people you are conversing with; for I suppose you would not, without this caution, have talked upon the same subject and in the same manner to a Minister of state, a Bishop, a philosopher, a captain, and a woman. A man of the world must, like the chameleon, be able to take every different hue, which is by no means a criminal or abject, but a necessary complaisance, for it relates only to manners, and not to morals.

One word only as to swearing; and that I hope and believe is more than is necessary. You may sometimes hear some people in good company interlard their discourse with oaths, by way of embellishment, as they think; but you must observe, too, that those who do so are never those who contribute in any degree to give that company the denomination of good company.

But, to conclude this long letter; all the above-mentioned rules, however carefully you may observe them, will lose half their effect if unaccompanied by the Graces. Whatever you say, if you say it with a supercilious, cynical face, or an embarrassed countenance, or a silly, disconcerted grin, will be ill received. If, into the bargain, *you mutter it, or utter it indistinctly and ungracefully*, it will be still worse received. If your air and address are vulgar and awkward, you may be esteemed indeed if you have great intrinsic merit; but you

will never please, and without pleasing you will rise, but heavily.... Adieu!

LORD CHESTERFIELD

### Glossary

<b>reckon</b>	: to calculate, to judge
<b>wherewithal</b>	: money or other means needed for a particular purpose
<b>polemical</b>	: controversial discussion
<b>indispose</b>	: disincline
<b>levity</b>	: light manner/behaviour
<b>egotism</b>	: the habit of talking and thinking about oneself excessively because of an undue sense of self-importance
<b>impudent</b>	: not showing due respect to another person
<b>calumnies</b>	: false and defamatory statements about someone in order to damage their reputation
<b>discernment</b>	: the ability to judge well, perceive clearly
<b>Cardinal virtues</b>	: the seven fundamental virtues (four natural virtues — justice, prudence, temperance and fortitude; three theological virtues — faith, hope and charity)
<b>imprudence</b>	: not showing care for the consequences of an action
<b>outré</b>	: outside the bounds of convention
<b>by the bye</b>	: incidentally
<b>panegyric</b>	: formal written or spoken praise
<b>prudent</b>	: careful to avoid undesired consequences
<b>mockery</b>	: insulting
<b>buffoonery</b>	: ridiculous but amusing behaviour
<b>complaisance</b>	: desire to please others
<b>interlard</b>	: mix writing or speech with foreign expressions
<b>embellishment</b>	: decorative detail
<b>Graces</b>	: pleasing countenance; elegance in form and manner, (In Greek mythology there are three beautiful goddesses, Aglaja, Thalia and Euphrosyne, daughters of Zeus. They were believed to personify and bestow charm, grace and beauty.)
<b>supercilious</b>	: assuming an air of superiority

### Comprehension

1. Why should one not talk for a long time while conversing with others?
2. What is Chesterfield's opinion about telling stories in company?
3. What is the main weakness of 'long talkers' and how should it be dealt with?
4. 'Take, rather than give, the tone of the company you are in'. Explain.
5. Why should one not speak about oneself?
6. What kind of conversation should be avoided in mixed companies? And why?
7. Why does the author warn his son against being too reserved?
8. Why is the author against listening to scandalous stories with keen interest?
9. What are the advantages of looking in the face of the listener when engaged in a conversation?

### Appreciation

1. 'Vanity and pride are strong elements in human nature.' What does the author mean by this and how should these be avoided?
2. 'A prudent reserve is as necessary as a seeming openness is prudent'. Elucidate.
3. Which characteristic of the chameleon is being referred to by the author and why?
4. How does a pleasing countenance have an impact on the listeners in a conversation?

### For Discussion

Good conduct is the true reflection of one's character

### Suggested Reading

*On Saying 'Please'* by A.G. Gardiner

*On Cheerfulness* by Joseph Addison

*Dream Children* by Charles Lamb

